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SATU KARHAPÄÄ-PUHAKKA & JARNO SUNI (EDS.)

The Attractiveness of Rural Tourism Destinations in the Republic of Karelia and Eastern Finland



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*Aducate – Centre for Training
and Development*

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the Republic of Karelia and
Eastern Finland*

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Forewords

Rural tourism is one of the important sectors of the tourism industry in Finland and in the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation. Contemporarily, rural tourism is in an early developing stage in the Republic of Karelia and market insight on the potentiality of rural tourism is practically non-existing. Today, Russia is the most important source market for the Finnish tourism industry and it can be assumed that consequently domestic market would be the most important target market for the Russian part of Karelia in the development of rural tourism in the region. Therefore, there is a need to gain and increase understanding about potential customers for rural tourism.

The project, *RUNAT - Product development and development of market insight and e-marketing of rural and nature tourism*, aims at developing and strengthening the expertise and know-how of rural and nature tourist companies in the Republic of Karelia and Eastern Finland. The target areas are Medvezhegorsk, Olonets and Pryazha in the Republic of Karelia and North Karelia and North Savo in Finland.

The main project activities are market research as well as development of tourism products and marketing communication with the help of a training and development program. Russian tourism and service sector entrepreneurs and authorities in the areas have taken part in the target oriented development process which includes a training program on product development, customer service, quality factors, pricing and e-marketing. The participants have tested each other's tourism products, consulted each other and taken part in the benchmarking of good practices both in Finland and in Russia. The Finnish entrepreneurs will also consult the Russian entrepreneurs and test their tourism products.

The market research consisted of three studies, which are included in this publication. The first study focuses on the needs, expectations and motivations of potential rural tourism customers in the regions of St. Petersburg and Moscow. The second study investigates social media groups connected to Finnish and Karelian tourism in the Russian most popular channel VKontakte. The third study concentrates on the image and attractiveness of the Republic of Karelia and Eastern Finland in Central European target markets. The studies were led by Professor Raija Komppula from the University of Eastern Finland.

The results of the market research give insight into the development of tourism products and target oriented marketing activities. The first results have already been utilized in training the Russian companies to develop new products and improve the quality of their services. The development process

will continue in cooperation with the entrepreneurs, local authorities and educational organizations taking part in the RUNAT project. Also Finnish tourism companies will get updated information and insight on the potential customers.

The RUNAT project is co-funded by the European Union, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Finland in the framework of Karelia ENPI CBC programme. It is carried out in 2012-2014 by the University of Eastern Finland, Karelia University of Applied Sciences, Savonia University of Applied Sciences, Karelian Institute of Tourism – the branch of RIAT and Saint-Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics.

On behalf of the RUNAT project, we thank the project partners, research leader, researchers and respondents for the support and participation in the implementation of the market research.

Joensuu 15.4.2014

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Contents

FOREWORDS.....	5
ABSTRACTS IN FINNISH AND IN RUSSIAN.....	8
1 THE POTENTIAL RUSSIAN RURAL TOURISTS IN THE AREAS OF SAINT PETERSBURG AND MOSCOW	14
1.1 Overall view of the potential russian rural tourists based on the survey results	14
1.2 Segmentation of potential Russian tourists by travel motivation	32
1.3 Follow-up study about the developed rural tourist products	44
<i>Jarno Suni</i>	
2 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING OF TOURISM PRODUCTS THROUGH RUSSIAN SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNEL VKONTAKTE: CASE STUDY FROM FINLAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF KARELIA.....	51
<i>Ekaterina Miettinen</i>	
3 EASTERN FINLAND AND THE REPUBLIC OF KARELIA IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION AS TOURIST DESTINATIONS – IMAGE, FAMILIARITY AND INTEREST OF TRAVEL FROM THE EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE	69
<i>Jarno Suni</i>	

Abstracts in Finnish and in Russian

1 POTENTIAALISET MAASEUTUMATKAILIJAT PIETARIN JA MOSKOVAN ALUEELTA

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on uuden tiedon kerääminen potentiaalisista venäläisistä maaseutumatkailijoista. Maaseutumatkalla tutkimuksessa tarkoitetaan vähintään yhden yön kestävästä vapaa-ajan matkaa maaseudulle tai kaupunkien ja lomakeskusten ulkopuoliselle alueelle. Tutkimuksen pääsiällinen huomio keskittyy selvittämään muun muassa mistä syistä venäläiset lähtevät maaseutumatkalle, millaiset majoittumistavat ovat maaseutumatkassa kiinnostavia, minkälaiset palvelut ja ominaisuudet ovat tärkeitä majoitukseen liittyen sekä mitä aktiviteetteja venäläiset halusivat tehdä maaseutumatkan aikana. Aineisto on pääosin kerätty Pietarin ja Moskovan alueilla järjestettyjen matkailutapahtumien yhteydessä vuonna 2012. Tutkimukseen osallistui 2096 vastaajaa. Saatujen vastausten perusteella maaseutumatkailu kiinnostaa venäläisiä. Noin 65% vastaajista ilmoitti mahdollisesti tekensä maaseutumatkan Venäjälle ja noin 75% Suomeen seuraava kolmen vuoden aikana. Tärkeimpinä syinä lähteä maaseutumatkalle ovat halu päästä kiireettömälle lomalle sekä muistorikkaiden elämysten kokeminen. Kiinnostavin majoittumistapa maaseutumatkalle on saunallinen mökki rauhallisessa ympäristössä vesistön läheisyydestä. Saunomisen ja uimisen lisäksi kiinnostavia aktiviteetteja ovat kierroksen paikallisille nähtävyyksille sekä paikalliseen kulttuuriin tutustuminen.

Tutkimuksen toisessa esitellään kyselyyn osallistuneiden venäläisten maaseutumatkailumotivaatioihin perustavan segmentoinnin tulokset. Segmentoinnin tavoitteena on luoda motivaatioiltaan eroavia asiakasryhmiä, joille pystytään suuntaamaan omanlaistaan markkinointiviestintää. Segmentoinnin tuloksena vastaajajoukosta erottui neljä ryhmää, 1) Muistorikkaan kokemuksen etsijät, 2) Liikunnalliset maaseutumatkailijat, 3) Mukavuudenhaluiset romantikot sekä 4) Kiireettömät maaseutumatkailijat.

Tutkimuksen kolmannessa osassa kerrotaan RUNAT-projektin aikana kehitettyjen matkailutuotteiden seurantatutkimuksen tulokset. Seurantatutkimus suunnattiin ensimmäiseen vaiheeseen osallistuneille ja tällä tutkimuksella haluttiin selvittää, kuinka kiinnostavina uusia maaseutumatkailutuotteita ja -kohteita pidetään, ja millaisena niiden hintataso koetaan. Lisäksi vastaajilla oli mahdollisuus kommentoida, miksi matkailutuote tai -kohde ei ole kiinnostava.

1 СЕЛЬСКИЙ ТУРИЗМ И ПОТЕНЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ТУРИСТЫ ИЗ МОСКВЫ И САНКТ ПЕТЕРБУРГА

Целью данного исследования является сбор информации о потенциальных русских туристах, заинтересованных в поездках в сельскую местность. Под сельским туризмом в данном исследовании подразумевается поездка на отдых по меньшей мере с одной ночевкой за пределами города или турбазы. В исследовании основное внимание уделяется следующим вопросам: почему российские туристы отправляются в сельскую местность, какие формы размещения более предпочтительны для них в сельской местности, какие услуги для них важны касательно размещения, а также какого рода деятельностью они хотели бы заниматься в данных поездках. Материалы собраны в основном на туристических мероприятиях, организованных в 2012-ом году в Москве и Московской области и в Санкт Петербурге и в Ленинградской области. В исследовании приняли участие 2096 опрошенных. На основе полученных результатов сделаны выводы, что сельский туризм интересует россиян. Около 65% из опрошенных сказали, что возможно в ближайшие три года они поедут отдыхать в сельскую местность на территории России и 75% на территории Финляндии. Главными причинами, по которым опрошенные собираются заняться сельским туризмом, являются желание провести отпуск спокойно, а также желание приобрести незабываемые впечатления от поездки. Самой популярной формой проживания было проживание в коттедже с сауной в спокойном месте вблизи от воды. Помимо сауны и купания популярными видами отдыха были названы экскурсии по местным достопримечательностям и знакомство с местной культурой.

Во второй части исследования участники опроса разделяются на подгруппы в зависимости от мотивации к сельскому туризму. Целью разделения на подгруппы является выделение различных категорий туристов для более направленного маркетинга на целевую аудиторию. В результате были выявлены четыре подгруппы: 1) Те кто ищут незабываемые впечатления, 2) Люди заинтересованные в спортивном туризме, 3) Романтики ищущие комфорта, и 4) Заинтересованные в неспешном сельском туризме.

В третьей части исследования рассказано о результатах мониторинга туристических услуг, предлагаемых в рамках проекта Рунат (Runat). Мониторинг был направлен на участников первой фазы проекта. Его целью было выяснить, насколько участники были заинтересованы новыми услугами и объектами сельского туризма, а также, как они относятся к ценам на данные услуги. К тому же у опрошенных была возможность комментировать, почему какая-нибудь туристическая услуга или туристический объект не был по их мнению интересным.

2 MATKAILUMARKKINOINTI VENÄLÄISEN SOME-KANAVAN VKONTAKTEN KAUTTA: TAPAUSTUTKIMUS SUOMESTA JA KARJALAN TASAVALLASTA

Yhä enemmän matkailijat tekevät päätöksiä sosiaalisesta mediasta saatujen tietojen perusteella tutkimustulosten perusteella sosiaalisella medialla on merkitystä matkailuyritysten kilpailukyvyille. Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tutkia Suomen ja Karjalan tasavallan matkailuyritysten näkyvyyttä VKontaktessa. VKontakte on Venäjän suosituin sosiaalisen median kanava, joka tarjoaa yrityksille mahdollisuuksia tavoittaa nykyisiä ja potentiaalisia asiakkaita mm. yritysryhmien kautta.

Tutkimuksessa selvitettiin, minkälaisia Suomea ja Karjalan tasavaltaa koskevia keskusteluryhmiä on olemassa ja mitä niissä puhutaan. Tulokset osoittivat, että Suomea koskevat matkailuryhmät VKontaktessa voidaan jakaa neljään ryhmään: 1) tietoa koko Suomesta, 2) tietoa tietyiltä alueilta Suomessa, 3) kiinnostuksen kohteena ostokset ja mainokset, 4) kiinnostuksen kohteena viihde tai muutoin luokittelematon kohde. Ryhmissä käydään keskustelua ostoksista, terveystalvuluista ja hämmästyttä herättävistä asioista Suomessa sekä esitetään paljon peruskysymyksiä Suomesta. Karjalan tasavaltaa koskevat ryhmät on perustettu seuraavien asioiden ympärille: Petroskoin kaupunki, majoitusta ja aktiivilomaa tarjoavat yritykset sekä ryhmät niille, jotka ovat ylipäättään kiinnostuneita lomailusta Karjalan tasavallasta. Keskusteluaiheet koskivat paikkoja, joissa kannattaa käydä, majoitusta sekä erilaisia aktiivilomailun vaihtoehtoja. Matkailuyritykset voivat hyödyntää tutkimuksessa saatuja tuloksia verkkomarkkinoinnin suunnittelussa.

2 МАРКЕТИНГ ТУРИСТИЧЕСКОГО ПРОДУКТА ЧЕРЕЗ СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ СЕТИ VKONTAKTE: КЕЙС-СТАДИ ИЗ ФИНЛЯНДИИ И РЕСПУБЛИКИ КАРЕЛИЯ

Все больше туристов принимают решения по поводу поездки, основываясь на информации, полученной из социальных сетей. По данным исследования продвижение фирмы через социальные сети влияет на ее конкурентоспособность. Целью исследования являлось изучить наличие финских групп и групп из Республики Карелия, связанных с туризмом, в VKontakte. С помощью созданной группы в социальных сетях можно общаться с нынешними и потенциальными клиентами и использовать ее рекламных целях.

В рамках исследования было выявлено, какие группы, посвященные туризму в Финляндии и Республике Карелия, есть в VKontakte и определены темы обсуждений в группах. Группы, касающиеся туризма в Финляндии, можно разделить на четыре подгруппы: 1) общие сведения о Финляндии, 2) сведения об определенном регионе в Финляндии, 3) покупки и реклама 4) развлечение и другое. Обсуждения в группах посвящены следующим темам: покупки, медицинские услуги, что удивило в Финляндии и другим вопросам, связанным с отдыхом в Финляндии. Группы по туризму в Республике Карелия касаются таких тем как: город Петрозаводск, услуги по размещению и активитетам, предоставленные разными фирмами, а также группы для тех, кого просто интересует отдых в Карелии. Достопримечательности, размещение, разные варианты активного отдыха обсуждались в данной категории групп. Результаты исследования могут быть полезны фирмам при планировании маркетинга в социальных сетях.

3 ITÄ-SUOMI JA VENÄJÄN KARJALA MATKAILUKOHTEINA – ALUEIDEN IMAGO, TUNNETTUUS JA KIINNOSTAVUUS EUROOPPALAISESTA NÄKÖKULMASTA

Tällä tutkimuksella pyrittiin selvittämään, millainen mielikuva eurooppalaisilla on Itä-Suomen ja Venäjän Karjalan alueista matkailukohteina, kuinka hyvin he tuntevat alueita ja kuinka kiinnostavina he pitävät näitä alueita. Tutkimus toteutettiin verkkopohjaisena kyselynä ja kyselytutkimuksesta viestittiin muun muassa sosiaalisessa mediassa, matkailuaiheisilla Internet-foorumeilla sekä kolmen kuukauden mittaisella Google-mainoskampanjalla. Vastauksia kyselyyn tuli 248 kappaletta. Suurin osa vastaajista on kotoisin Itävallasta, Saksasta, Italiasta ja Iso-Britanniasta. Eurooppalaisten mielestä etenkin luontoon yhdistyvät mielikuvat liittyvät vahvasti sekä Itä-Suomeen että Venäjän Karjalaan. Molemmilla alueet tarjoavat vastaajien mielestä luontonähtävyyksiä ja kauniita maisemia sekä mahdollisuuden luontoaktiiviteetteihin ja seikkailuun. Alueet nähdään rauhallisina ja harvaanasuttuina. Voimakkaimmin alueiden välistä mielikuvallista eroa esiintyy vastaajien mukaan muun muassa majoituksen, ravintoloiden ja palveluiden laatuun, turvallisuuteen, maineeseen, infrastruktuuriin sekä paikallisten kanssa käydyn kommunikoinnin helppouteen liittyen, jotka tässä kohdin nähdään suotuisammiksi Itä-Suomen alueella.

Tulososissa esitetään myös mielikuvalliset erot kolmen eri ryhmän välillä, 1) henkilöiden, jotka ovat vierailleet alueella, 2) henkilöiden, jotka mielestään omaavat idean millainen alue on, sekä 3) henkilöiden, jotka mielestään eivät omaa minkäläistä ideaa millainen alue on. Mielikuvien lisäksi tutkimuksessa kysyttiin, aikooko vastaaja vierailla alueilla tulevaisuudessa, minkä tyyppisistä matkoista hän olisi kiinnostunut alueilla sekä kuinka Venäjän nykyinen viisumikäytäntö ja sen mahdollinen poistuminen vaikuttaisi tulevaisuuden matkoihin alueelle. Vastaajista noin 11% on aikaisemmin vieraillut Itä-Suomen alueella ja noin 4% Venäjän Karjalan alueella. Itä-Suomi on vastaajien mukaan kiinnostavampi matkakohde, sillä noin 40% on kiinnostunut matkustamaan Itä-Suomeen ja 47% voisi harkita vierailevansa alueella. Matkailusta Venäjän Karjalaan on kiinnostunut noin 29% ja 45% vastaajista voisi harkita matkailevansa alueella. Noin 54% vastaajista kokee tämän hetkisen Venäjän viisumikäytännön esteeksi Venäjällä vierailuun. Mikäli Venäjälle voisi matkustaa ilman viisumia, noin 39% vastaajista tulisi matkustamaan Venäjälle tulevaisuudessa ja 51% vastaajista harkitsisi vierailua Venäjälle.

3 ВОСТОЧНАЯ ФИНЛЯНДИЯ И РЕСПУБЛИКА КАРЕЛИЯ КАК ОБЪЕКТЫ ТУРИЗМА - ИМИДЖ, ИЗВЕСТНОСТЬ И ПРИВЛЕКАТЕЛЬНОСТЬ С ТОЧКИ ЗРЕНИЯ ЖИТЕЛЕЙ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ И ЮЖНОЙ ЕВРОПЫ

Целью данного исследования было выяснить, как жители Европы воспринимают Восточную Финляндию и республику Карелия как объекты сельского туризма, насколько хорошо им знакомы эти территории и насколько они интересны европейцам. Исследование было осуществлено с помощью интернет-опроса. Опрос был анонсирован в социальных медиа и в поисковике Google (трехмесячный договор на рекламу опроса). Было получено 248 ответов. Большинство из принявших участие в опросе были жители Австрии, Германии, Италии и Великобритании. По мнению европейцев, основные их представления о Восточной Финляндии и о Карелии связаны прежде всего с природой. Обе территории предлагают по представлениям участников опроса природные достопримечательности и красивые пейзажи, а также возможность для активного отдыха и приключений на природе. Территории опрошенные характеризуют как спокойные и редконаселенные. Наибольшая разница в представлении европейцев между двумя этими территориями относится к качеству проживания, питания и услуг, а также к вопросам безопасности, репутации, инфраструктуры и сложности общения с местным населением. В этом смысле Карелия проигрывает Восточной Финляндии.

В результатах исследования представлены мнения трех групп людей: 1) тех, кто были на данных территориях, 2) тех, кто имеют по их мнению общее представление, что это за территории, и 3) тех, кто не имеет никого представления, что это за территории. Помимо представлений, участники отвечали на вопросы: собираются ли они посетить эти территории в будущем, в каком виде туризма они были бы заинтересованы, и как процедура получения российской визы и возможная ее отмена в будущем повлияют на туризм в республике Карелия. Из опрошенных около 11% были раньше в Восточной Финляндии и около 4% были в республике Карелия. Восточная Финляндия является более интересным объектом для туризма, поскольку примерно 40% опрошенных хотели бы побывать там и 47% готовы обдумать такую возможность. Побывать в Карелии в свою очередь хотели бы 29% и 45%, соответственно, готовы обдумать такую возможность. Около 54% опрошенных считают, что визовая политика России является преградой для туризма в Россию. Если же визы для европейцев отменят, то 39% опрошенных хотели бы побывать в России, а 51% готовы обдумать такую возможность.

1 The potential Russian rural tourists in the areas of Saint Petersburg and Moscow

*Jarno Suni
Project Researcher
University of Eastern Finland*

1.1 OVERALL VIEW OF THE POTENTIAL RUSSIAN RURAL TOURISTS BASED ON THE SURVEY RESULTS

1.1.1 Introduction

The aim of this study is to increase understanding about customers for rural tourism in the Russian markets by investigating the motivations and preferences of potential rural tourists in the regions of St. Petersburg and Moscow and, furthermore, to identify potential rural tourist segments. The study focuses on the areas of eastern Finland (the regions of North Karelia and North Savo) and the Republic of Karelia (the regions of Medvezhegorsk, Olonets and Pryazha). These regions that are part of a co-operation area called Euregio Karelia (Karelia ENPI CBC, 2014). The major reasons and motivations for travelling to these areas are related to rural surroundings, nature and opportunities for nature based, non-urban activities. Rural tourism usually refers to tourism outside densely populated areas and tourism centres (Pesonen & Komppula, 2010). It also includes towns surrounded by countryside that are essentially rural in their functions and characteristics (Barke, 2004). Euregio Karelia can be seen as a rural tourism destination.

In Finland, like in several other European countries, rural tourism is a relatively important sector of the tourism industry. In the Republic of Karelia in Russia, on the other hand, rural tourism is still in an early emergent stage, and market insight in rural tourism potential is in practice non-existent. Russia is currently the most important source market for the Finnish tourism industry. In 2011, Russians comprised 45 per cent of the foreign visitors, which is approximately 3.3 million visitors in total (Finnish Tourist Board, 2012). Since the clientele for rural tourism is in most cases mainly domestic (Komppula & Saraniemi, 2007), perhaps the domestic market would be the most important target market also for the Republic of Karelia in the development of rural tourism in the region.

This chapter is divided into three parts. In this first part, the overall results of the study are presented. The second part consists of the results of the seg-

mentation of the potential Russian rural tourists by travel motivation. In the third part, the results of a follow-up study about the interest in the developed tourist products are discussed.

1.1.2 Data Collection

The data gathering for the study was conducted in Saint Petersburg and Moscow using convenience based sampling. The target groups were the youth (18-25 years old), active segment (26-55 years old) and segment of 56-75 years old. In order to reach the potential rural tourists, the collection took place in several tourism related events, such as INWETEX-CIS Travel Market (Saint Petersburg) and International Tourism Day (Moscow). Data collection was made by the students and post-graduates of the Saint Petersburg State University of Engineering and Economics and Russian International Academy of Tourism (Moscow). Survey data was collected by a paper and pencil type of survey and then transferred into an electronic database for analysis. In addition, an electronic version of survey questionnaire was available.

1.1.3 Results

Demographics

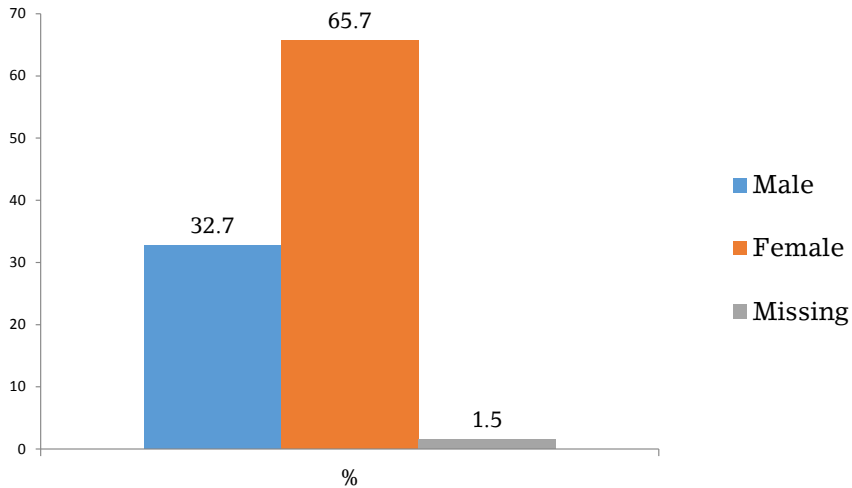


Figure 1.1. The gender distribution of respondents. (n = 2096)

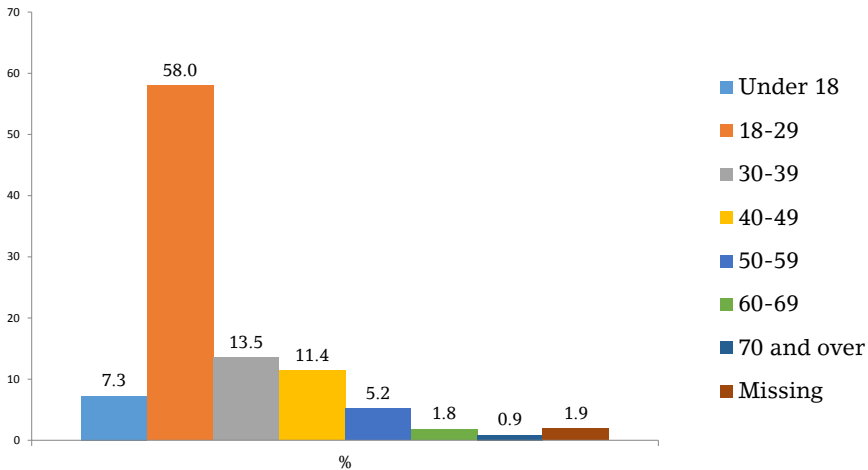


Figure 1.2. The age distribution of the respondents. (n = 2096).

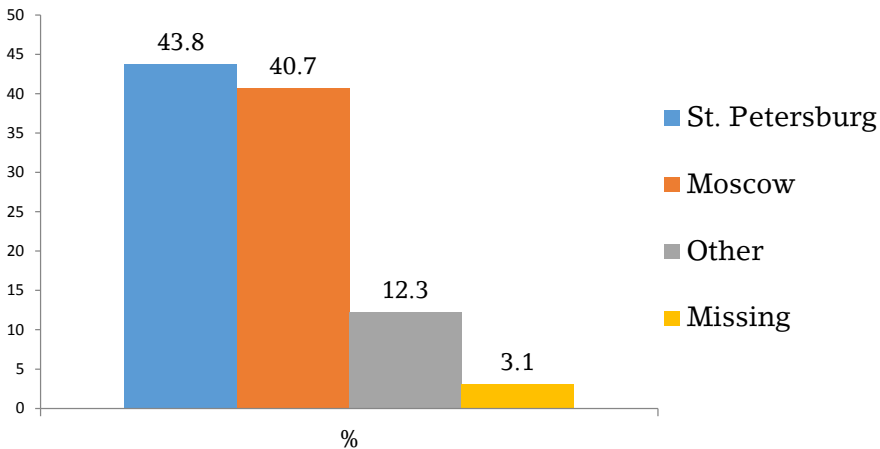


Figure 1.3. The regions of residence. (n = 2096)

In Figures 1.1 and 1.2, the respondents' age and the region of residence are shown. Most of the respondents are females (65.7%), most commonly the age of 18 to 29 (58%). By region of residence (Figure 1.3), the respondents are quite evenly divided, as 43.8% are from St. Petersburg and 40.7% from Moscow.

Information related to past and future rural holidays

Rural tourism is defined as a leisure trip to a place situated in a rural setting, or in a setting outside cities and tourist centres. The duration of the trip is at least one night and during the trip the traveler aims to participate especially in other than urban activities, such as shopping. For the respondents, Russia has been a popular choice for a rural holiday as a destination. Over 75 per cent of all respondents have been on a rural holiday in Russia. Sixteen per cent of

the respondents have been on a rural holiday in Finland, and 24 per cent in other destinations (Figure 1.4).

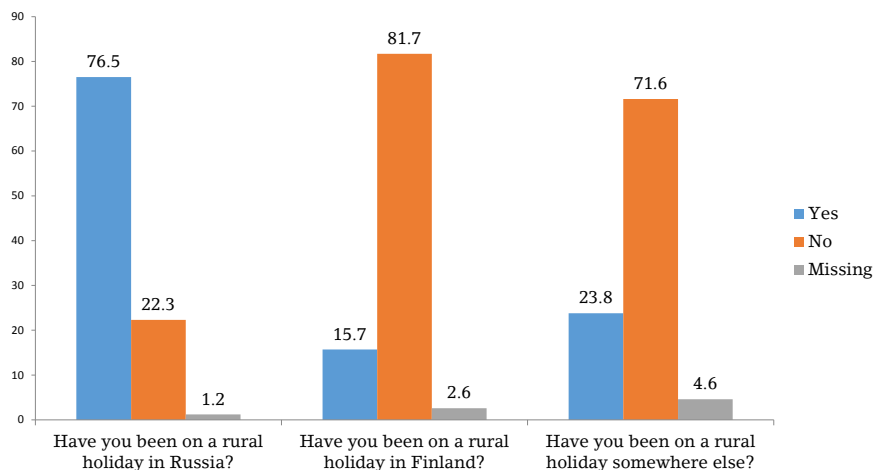


Figure 1.4. Information on rural holiday travels in Russia, Finland and other regions. (n = 2096)

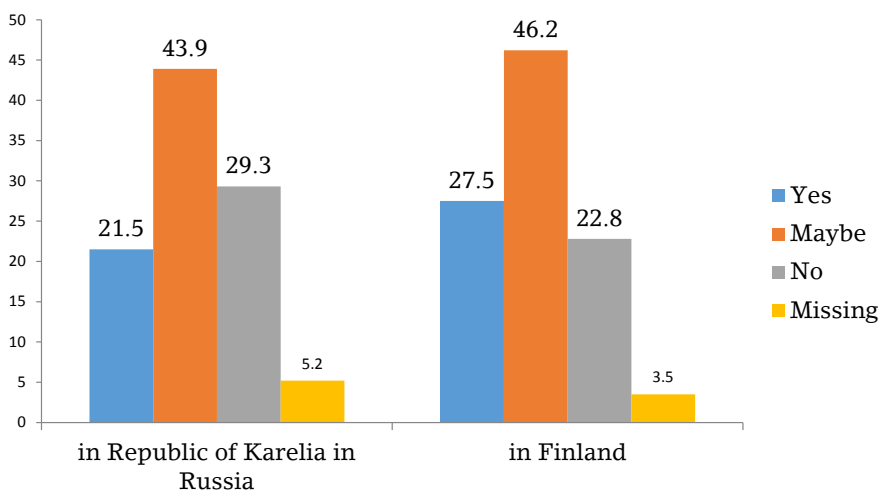


Figure 1.5. Respondents' opinions about future rural holiday trips within the next three years. (n = 2096)

The respondents were asked if they would consider having a rural holiday within the next one to three years (Figure 1.5). Over 65 per cent of the respondents are planning to take a rural holiday either in Russia or in Finland. Finland seems to be a more interesting destination for a rural holiday: nearly half of the respondents (46.2%) would go on a rural holiday in Finland within the next three years and 28% are definitely considering this option.

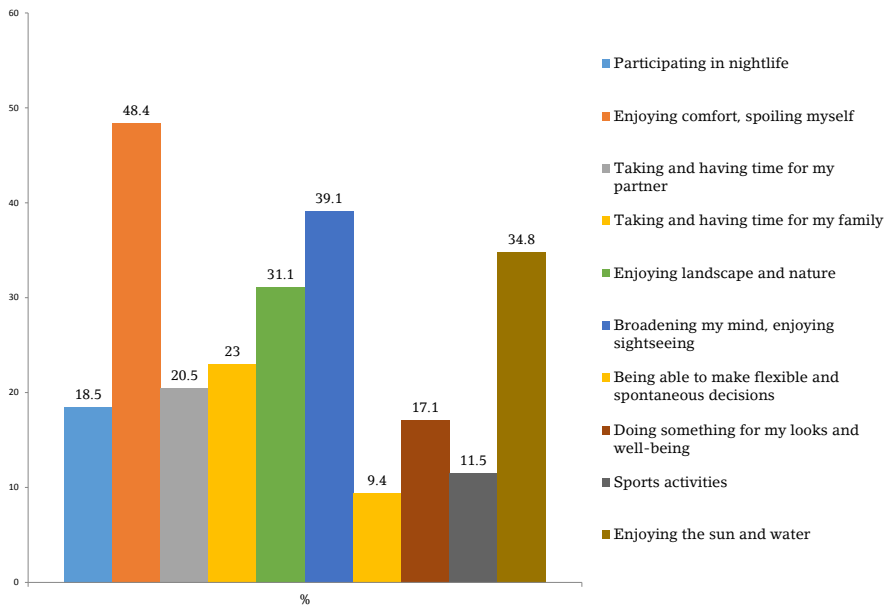


Figure 1.6. Needs and wants that affect the choice of a destination for a general holiday. (n = 2096)

According to the respondents, the most important reasons that affect the choosing of a general holiday destination were enjoying comfort, sightseeing, the sun and water (Figure 1.6). Third of the respondents also considered landscapes and nature important. The respondents were given the possibility to choose the maximum of three answers.

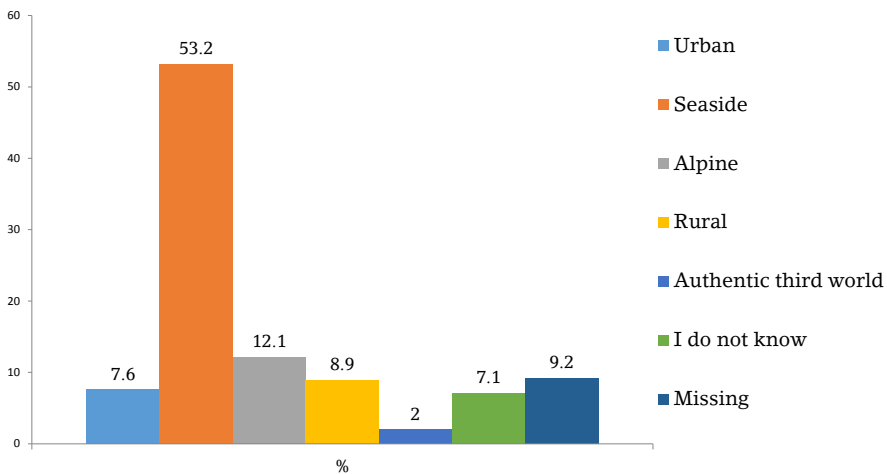


Figure 1.7. The type of destination that respondents prefer the most when travelling for a holiday in general. (N = 2096)

Over half of the respondents (53.2%) would choose a destination on seaside for their usual holiday trip (Figure 1.7). The second most popular choice would be an alpine destination (12.1%).

Rural holiday related information

The following rural holiday related data was gathered from those respondents who answered that they would be going on a rural holiday within the next three years.

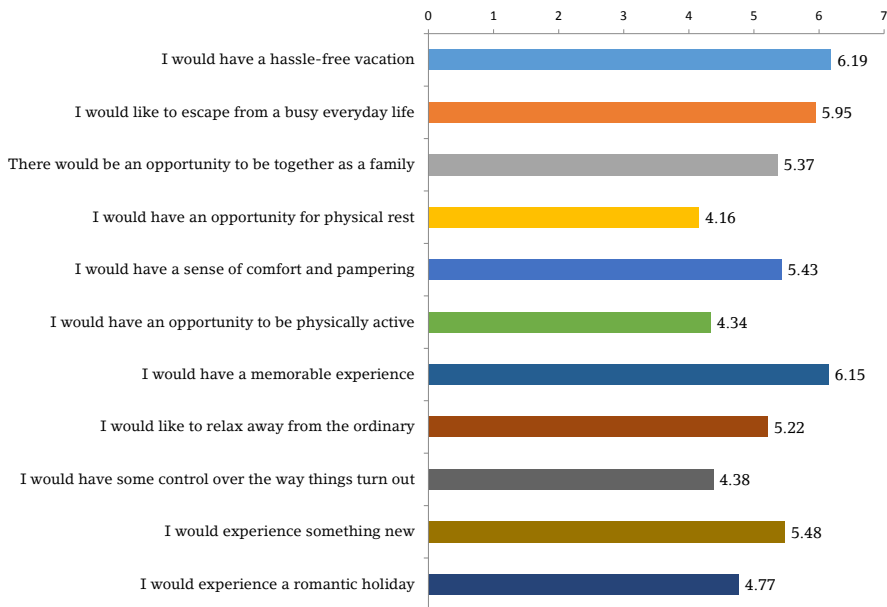


Figure 1.8. The importance of various travel motivations for a rural tourism holiday. (N = 1429, listwise) (7 = very important ... 1 = not important at all)

The most important travel motivations for a rural holiday are to have a hassle-free vacation (mean = 6.10) and to have a memorable experience (mean = 6.15). Also escaping a busy everyday life (mean = 5.95), experiencing something new (mean = 5.48) and having a feeling of comfort (mean = 5.43) were considered important (Figure 1.8).

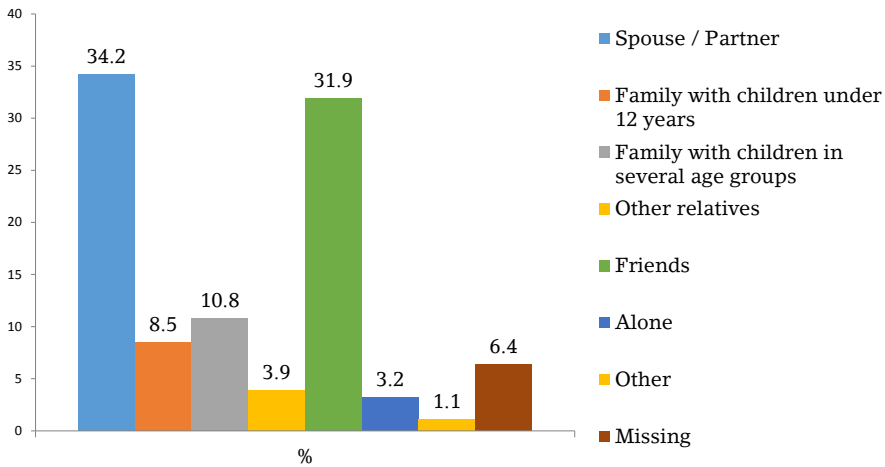


Figure 1.9. The most probable holiday companionship during a rural holiday. (N = 1676)

The most probable companions to a rural holiday would be either spouse/partner/significant other (34.2%) or friends (31.9%) (Figure 1.9).

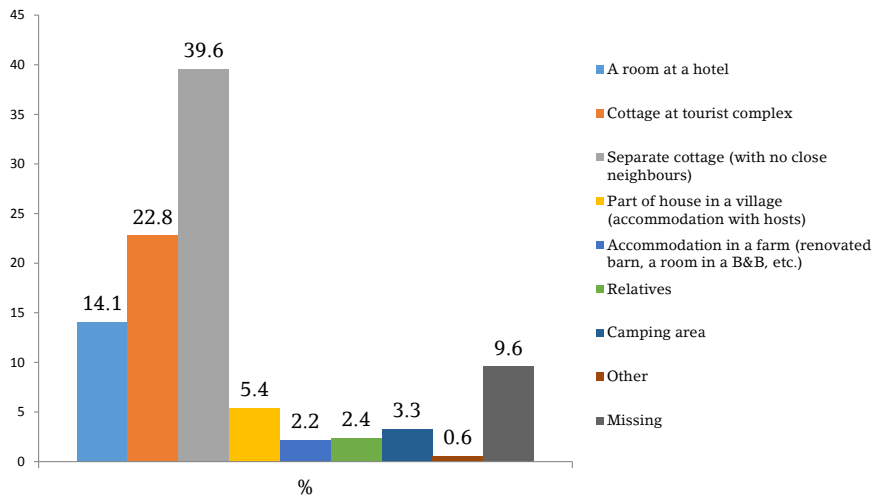


Figure 1.10. The most wanted accommodation for next rural holiday. (N = 1676)

The most popular choice for accommodation on a rural holiday is a separate cottage (39.6%), meaning that there are no neighbouring cottages or other settlements nearby (Figure 1.10). The second most favored accommodation type is a cottage at a tourist complex (22.8%).

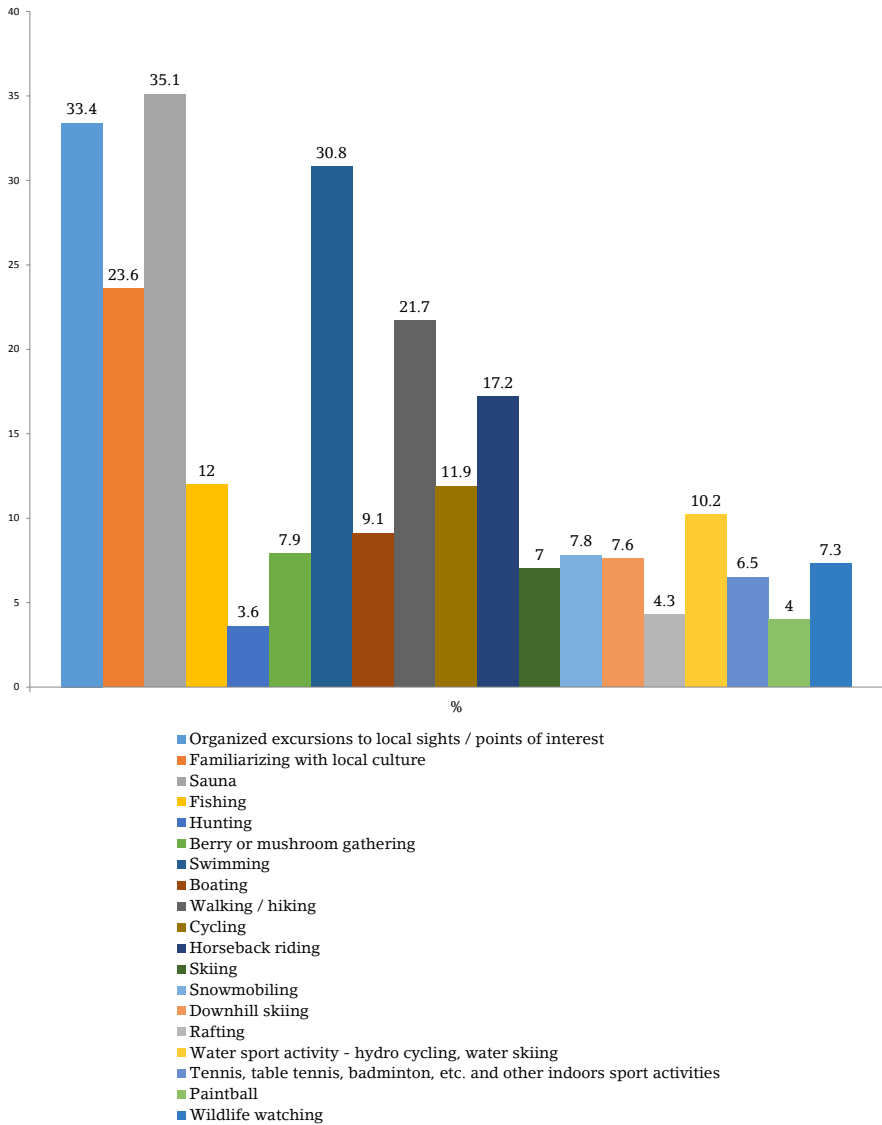


Figure 1.11. Activities that respondents are interested in doing on a rural holiday. (N = 1676)

According to the respondents, a potential Russian rural holiday tourists are interested in activities such as going to sauna (35.1%), swimming (30.8%) and going on excursions to local sights or other points of interest (33.4%) (Figure 1.11).

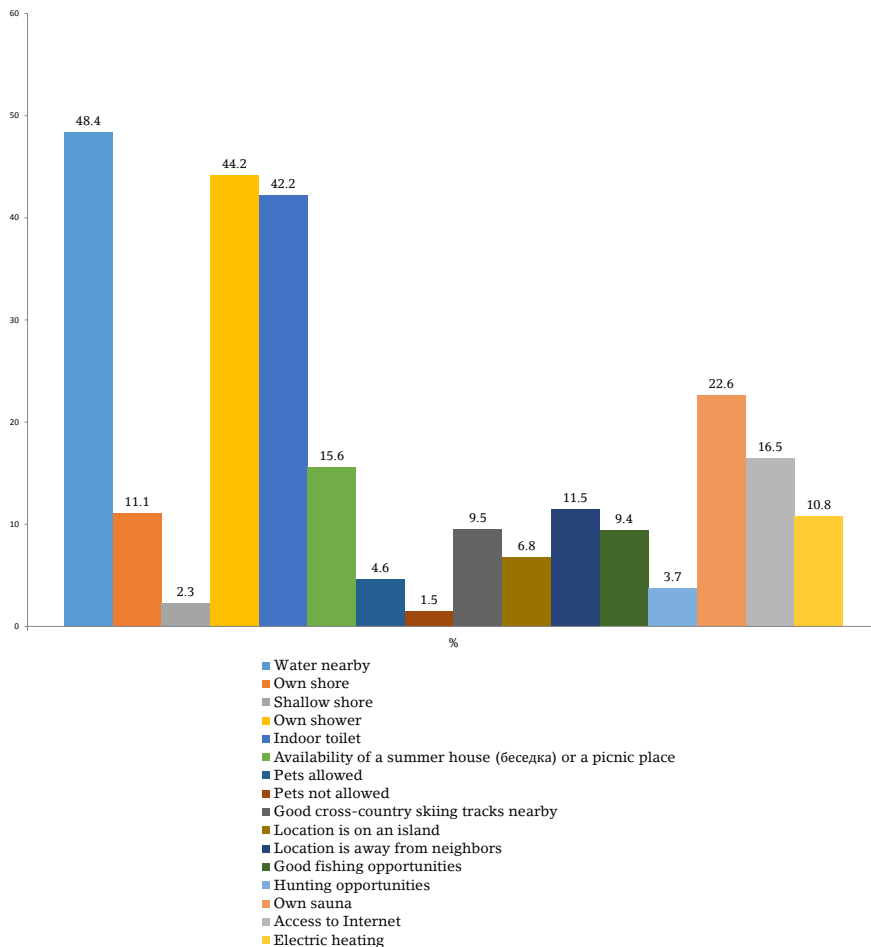


Figure 1.12. Important accommodation related attributes affecting the choice between rural holiday accommodation options. (N = 1676)

The closeness of water (48.4%) is important when choosing an accommodation for a rural holiday (Figure 1.12). Also facilities, such as shower (44.2%) and indoor toilet, are considered important (42.2%). In rural areas, summer houses, cabins and other types of accommodation might not have running water available.

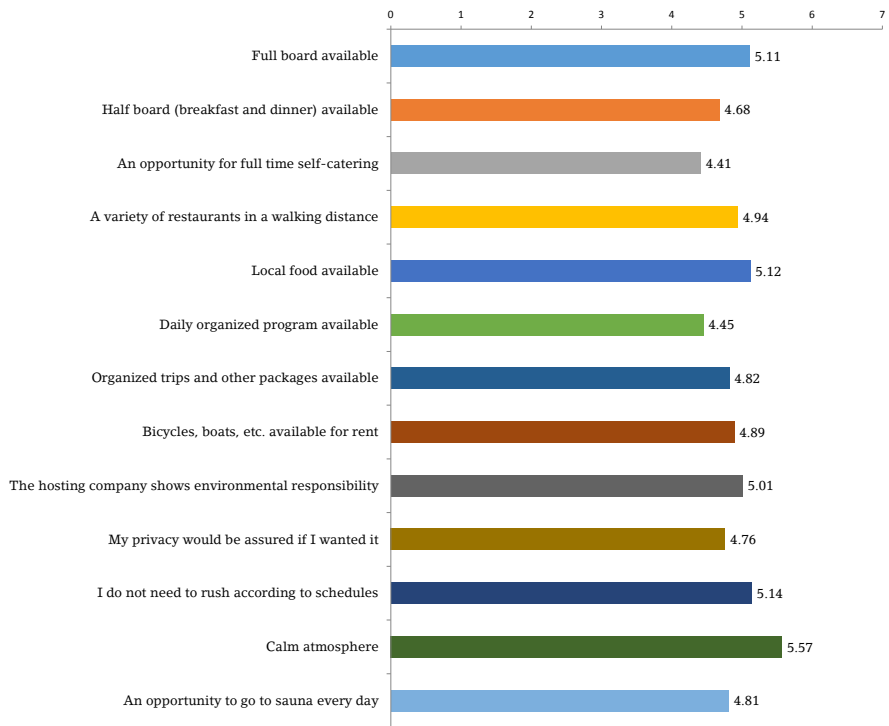


Figure 1.13. The importance of accommodation related services. (N = 1676)
 (7 = very important ... 1 = not important at all)

Calm atmosphere is considered the most important accommodation related factor (mean = 5.57). Other factors that are considered somewhat important are that there is no need to rush according to schedules (mean = 5.14), local food is available (mean = 5.12) and also the availability of a full board (mean = 5.11).

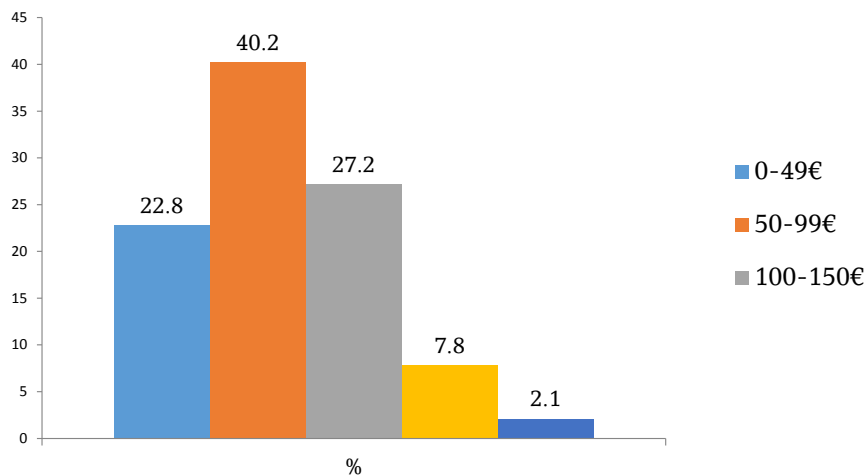


Figure 1.14. The daily average amount of money that visitors are willing to pay per person when staying at a rural destination in Finland. (N = 1676)

Most of the respondents (40.2%) are ready to spend approximately 50 to 99 euro a day at a rural destination in Finland (Figure 1.14).

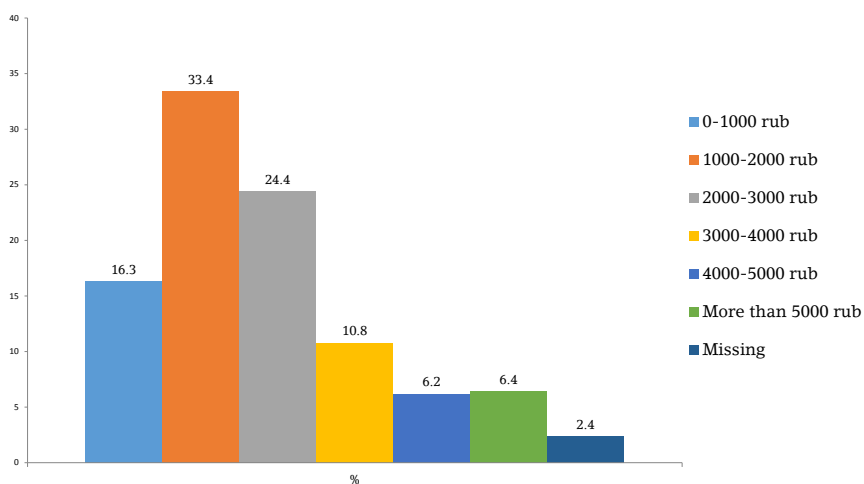


Figure 1.15. The daily average amount of money that visitors are willing to pay per person when staying at a rural destination in Russia. (N = 1676)

One third (33.4%) of the respondents are willing to spend between one and two thousand rubles in a rural holiday destination in Russia (Figure 1.15). One fourth (24.4%) would be willing to spend two to three thousand rubles per day.

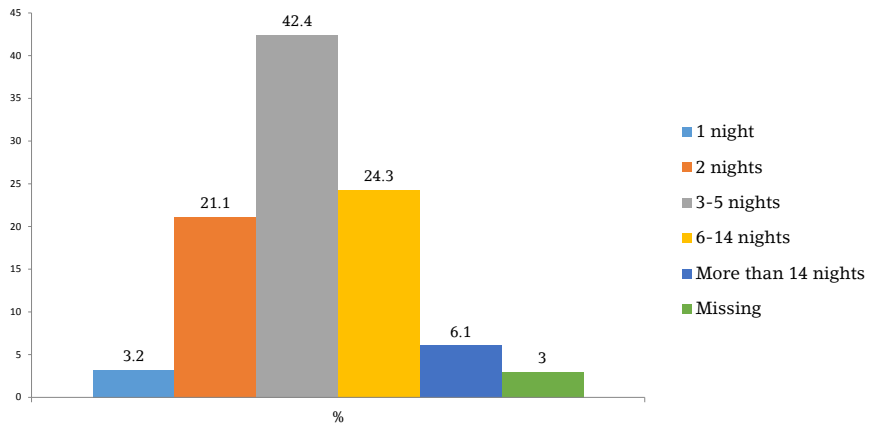


Figure 1.16. The most suitable duration for a rural holiday. (N = 1676)

According to the respondents, the most suitable duration for a rural holiday destination is three to five nights (Figure 1.16). Almost one fourth of the respondents (24.3%) would consider staying longer, 6-14 nights, at a rural holiday destination.

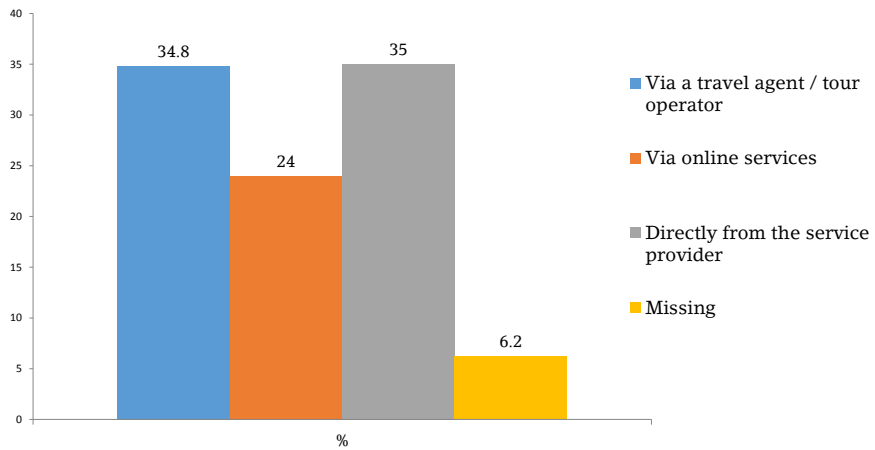


Figure 1.17. The most likely way for booking a rural holiday. (N = 1676)

For booking a rural holiday two options are almost equally popular, either directly from the service provider (35%) or via a travel agent or tour operator (34.8%) (Figure 1.17).

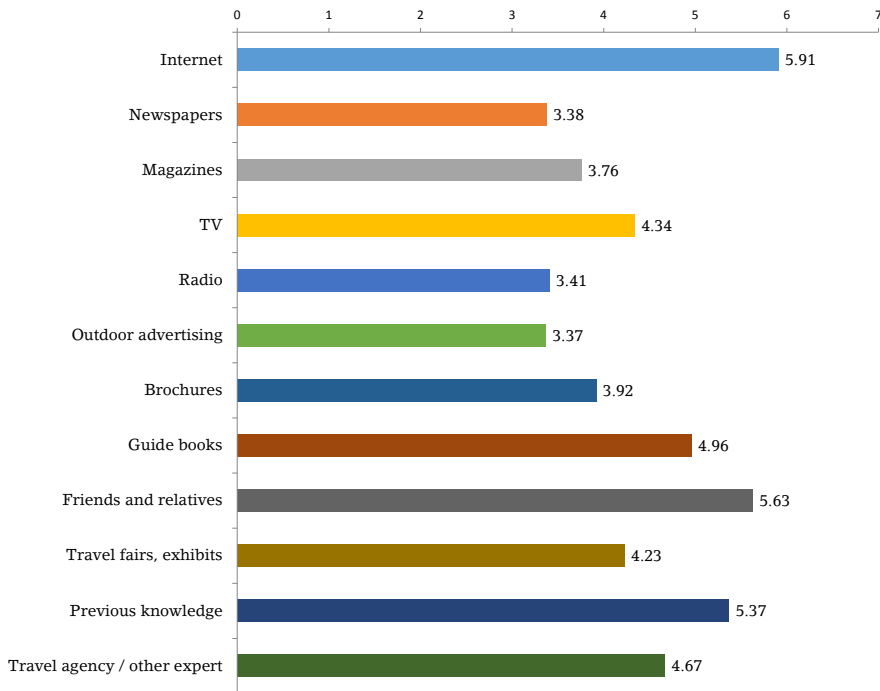


Figure 1.18. The importance of various information sources for holiday planning. (N = 1744, listwise) (7 = very important ... 1 = not important at all)

According to the respondents, Internet (mean = 5.91) is the most important source of information for holiday planning (Figure 1.18). The second most important source of information is friends and relatives (mean = 5.63), and the third, the previous knowledge (mean = 5.37). The least important sources of information are outdoor advertising (mean = 3.37), newspapers (mean = 3.38) and radio (mean = 3.41).

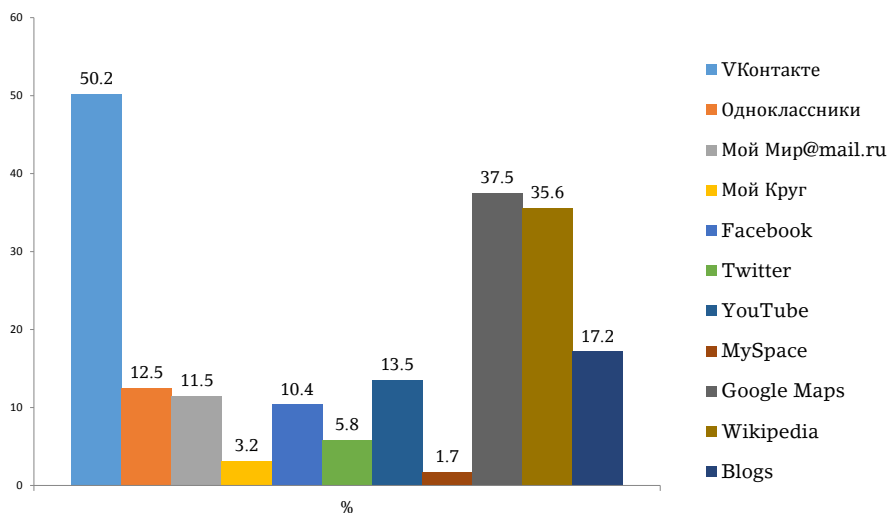


Figure 1.19. The use of social media services for information search in holiday planning. (n = 2096)

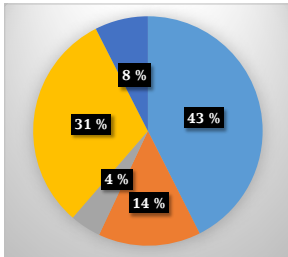
The most frequently used social media services for the search of information for holiday planning are ВКонтакте (50.2%), followed by Google Maps (37.5%) and Wikipedia (35.6%) (Figure 1.19).

Images about Eastern Finland and the Republic of the Karelia

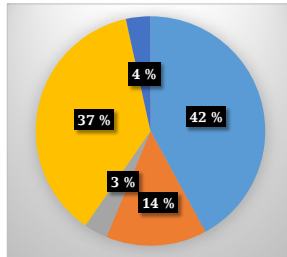
In this part of the survey, respondents were asked to choose the option that illustrates the best their opinion on chosen tourism destination areas. Four of the areas, North Karelia, Central Karelia, South Karelia, Ladoga Karelia and Obonezhye are located in the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation and two of the areas, North Savo and North Karelia in Eastern Finland. The results are shown in diagrams for each area and the opinions of the respondents are grouped by their area of residence.

NORTH KARELIA – LOUHI, KALEVALA, KOSTOMUKSHA, KEM, WHITE SEA AREAS

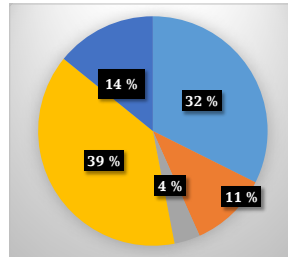
**St. Petersburg
(n = 893)**



Moscow (n = 782)

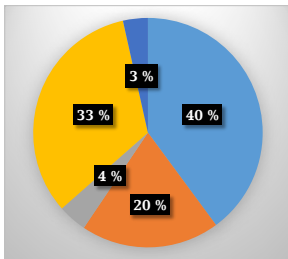


Other (n = 247)

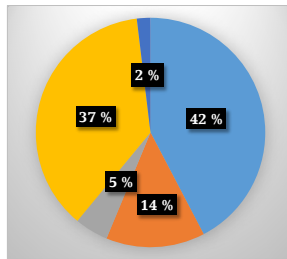


CENTRAL KARELIA – THE AREAS OF MUEZERSKY, SEGEZHA, SUOYARVSKY

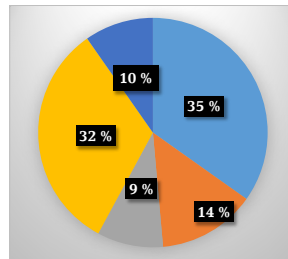
**St. Petersburg
(n = 880)**








Moscow (n = 770)



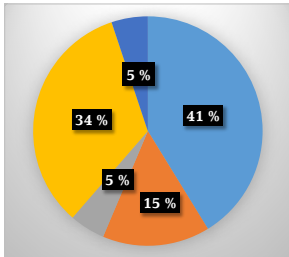
Other (n = 245)



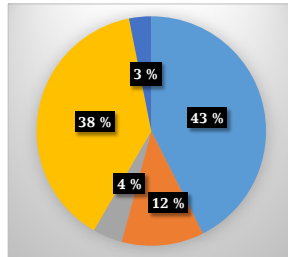
-  I have no images (knowledge) of the destination at all
-  I have some images of the destination, but based on them, I have no interest to travel in the area for a holiday
-  I have been in this destination but would not travel there for a holiday
-  I have not been in the destination, but I would be interested to travel there for a holiday
-  I have been in this destination and would travel there again for a holiday

SOUTH KARELIA – DISTRICTS OF PRYAZHINSKY AND OLONETSKY

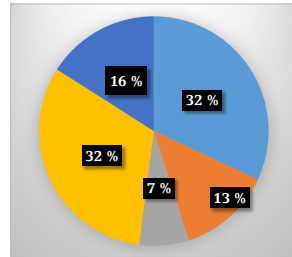
St. Petersburg
(n = 878)



Moscow (n = 768)

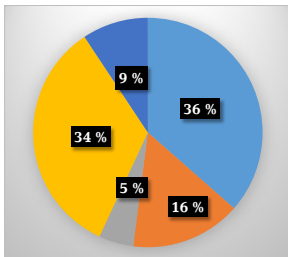


Other (n = 244)

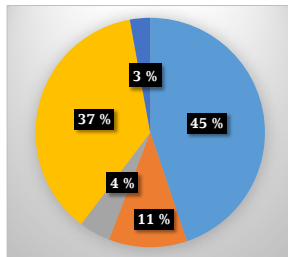


LADOGA KARELIA - PITKÄRANTA, SORTAVALA, LAHDENPOHSKY

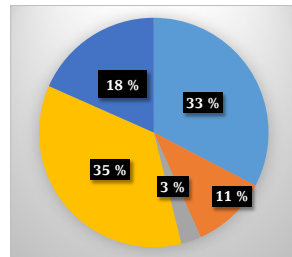
St. Petersburg
(n = 880)



Moscow (n = 770)



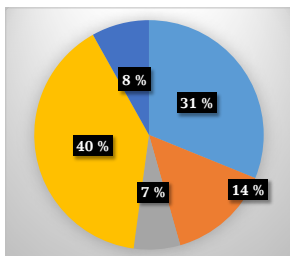
Other (n = 245)



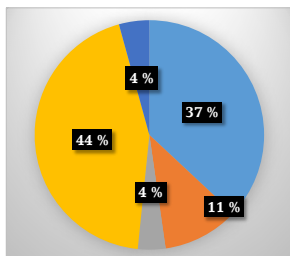
- I have no images (knowledge) of the destination at all
- I have some images of the destination, but based on them, I have no interest to travel in the area for a holiday
- I have been in this destination but would not travel there for a holiday
- I have not been in the destination, but I would be interested to travel there for a holiday
- I have been in this destination and would travel there again for a holiday

**OBONEZHYE (THE AREA AROUND LAKE ONEGA) -
PRIONEZHSKY, KONDOPOGA, MEDVEZHYESGORSKY,
PUDOZHESKY**

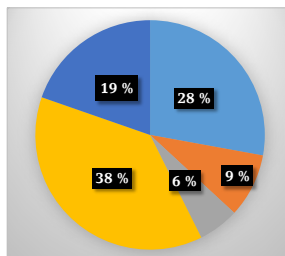
**St. Petersburg
(n = 886)**



Moscow (n = 771)

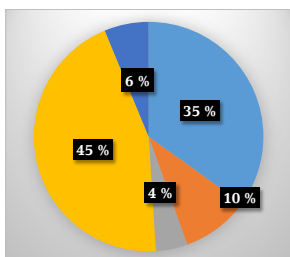


Other (n = 244)

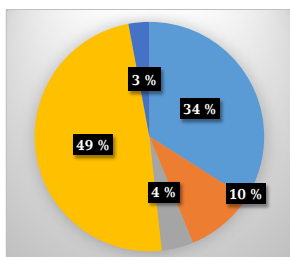


NORTH SAVO IN FINLAND

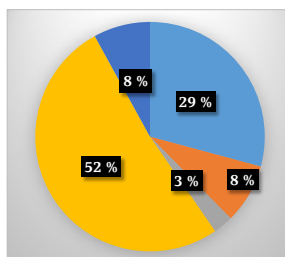
**St. Petersburg
(n = 896)**



Moscow (n = 783)



Other (n = 250)



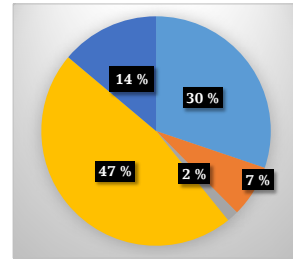
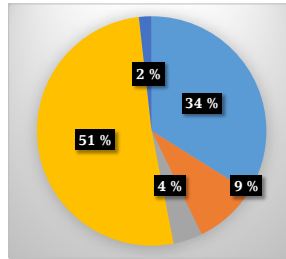
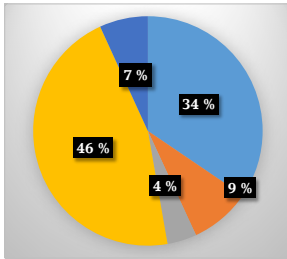
- I have no images (knowledge) of the destination at all
- I have some images of the destination, but based on them, I have no interest to travel in the area for a holiday
- I have been in this destination but would not travel there for a holiday
- I have not been in the destination, but I would be interested to travel there for a holiday
- I have been in this destination and would travel there again for a holiday

NORTH KARELIA IN FINLAND

**St. Petersburg
(n = 893)**

Moscow (n = 782)

Other (n = 245)



The most common opinions for all destination areas were either, “I have no images (knowledge) of the destination at all”, or, “I have not been in the destination, but I would be interested to travel there for a holiday”. On the Russian side of Karelia, the respondents do not have images (or knowledge) of the areas of North, Central, South and Ladoga Karelia (36.4-38.4%). The area of Obonezhnye is more familiar to them, they have not visited the area, but are interested in visiting it as 38.4% chose this option. The areas in Finland seem to be interesting for Russian travellers as 44.6% would like to visit North Savo and 45.3% would like to visit North Karelia in Finland. Still, 31.8% do not have any images of the areas in Finland. There are no drastic differences in the images of the areas when the respondents living in St. Petersburg and Moscow are compared. The respondents living in other areas are a more diverse group, therefore the opinions vary somewhat between the areas.

1.2 SEGMENTATION OF POTENTIAL RUSSIAN TOURISTS BY TRAVEL MOTIVATION

1.2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of segmentation of potential Russian tourists are presented. The data presented in the previous chapter was used in the segmentation with certain limitations. After the incomplete and partially filled forms were discarded from the analysis to avoid missing data, the number of responses added up to 1027. Since the objective of the study is to investigate motivations and expectations regarding a rural holiday, therefore the focus is on the respondents who informed that they are planning to take a rural holiday within the next three years. This limits the number of responses used in the analysis to 810.

1.2.2 Definitions and the choosing of the motivational variables

A rural tourism holiday is defined as a leisure trip that lasts at least one night in a place situated in a rural setting or in a setting outside cities and tourist centres. During the trip, the tourist aims to participate especially in other than urban activities such as shopping. Motivations in this study are divided into push and pull motivations. Push motivations are the motivations that tourists create by themselves. These motivations then “push” them towards the destination which should fulfil their desires (Leiper, 1990). Pull motivations are the destination related attributes that attract and “pull” tourists to visit.

The goal of this part of the study was to investigate the importance of push and pull motivations that affect the holiday choices Russian tourists make, earlier literature on the topic was examined. Examination of push and pull motivations of rural tourists has long traditions and the topic has been popular in the academic literature during the past decade. For example, Frochot (2005) studied the profiles of rural tourists in two Scottish locations using 13 different benefit statements. Factor analysis revealed four underlying factors, Outdoors, Rurality, Relaxation and Sport. Molera and Albaladejo (2007) studied the benefits sought by rural tourists. From the data collected in Spain they identified five factors, Nature and peacefulness, Physical and cultural activities, Family, Trip features and Rural life. Park and Yoon (2009) segmented rural tourists in Korea according to their motivations. They distinguished six travel motivation factors, Relaxation, Socialization, Learning, Family togetherness, Novelty, and Excitement.

A wide range of push and pull variables based on a large number of earlier literature were included in a single rural tourism segmentation study conducted in Finland by Pesonen (2012). Also, a list of 11 travel motivations was adapted from the study by Pesonen (2013). Moreover, 13 different accommo-

dation company service attributes which are considered as pull motivations, were included in this study.

1.2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis consisted of three phases. K-means cluster analysis was conducted on the basis of the 11 push travel motivation items to create segments. To determine the most suitable cluster solution, the data was inspected via dendrogram which showed that clustering the data into three to five clusters would most likely give the best solution. These three options were then created and observed more closely to find the solution in which the segments differ the most. Discriminant analysis was used as the second phase to ensure and test the discriminating characteristics of travel motivation items. In the last phase, one-way ANOVA with Scheffé's post-hoc test and chi-square statistics were used with appropriate attributes to determine the statistically significant differences between segments.

1.2.4 Results

A four-cluster solution is presented in Table 1.1, where push motivation items with mean values for each cluster and the overall mean are listed. The respondents were asked to evaluate the importance of the travel motivation items for a rural holiday on a 7-point Likert scale, where 7 is considered very important and 1 not important at all. In cluster 1, which incorporates 12.3% of the respondents, the main motivational items were to have a memorable experience, have a hassle-free holiday and experience something new. These items were also important for the second cluster, which incorporates 25.1% of the respondents. However, the members in second cluster considered those motivations to be more important.

As a differentiating factor, the members of the second cluster considered opportunity to be physically active important for their holiday. In cluster 3, which incorporates the most of the respondents (36.4%), all items were considered somewhat important. However, clearly distinctive items for the group are opportunity for physical rest, feel a sense of comfort and pampering, and experience a romantic holiday. Cluster 4 incorporates 26.2% of the respondents. In this group, the members considered have a hassle-free holiday, to escape from a busy everyday life and being together as a family as the most important motivations. They did not consider items to relax away from the ordinary and experience something new as important as the members in the other clusters. The clusters were named on the basis of the most important or the most distinguishing motivations as follows: (1) Memorable Experience Seekers, (2) Active Rural Holidayers, (3) Comfort Seeking Romantics, and (4) Casual Rural Holiday Seekers.

	Overall mean	I Mean	II Mean	III Mean	IV Mean	F	Sig.
I would have a hassle-free holiday	6.16	5.17 ^{bcd}	5.7 ^{acd}	6.59 ^{ab}	6.47 ^{ab}	52.30	.000
I would like to escape from a busy everyday life	6.00	4.98 ^{bcd}	6.01 ^a	6.40 ^{ad}	5.90 ^{ac}	35.32	.000
There would be an opportunity to be together as a family	5.37	2.79 ^{bcd}	5.34 ^{acd}	5.91 ^{ab}	5.87 ^{ab}	135.18	.000
I would have an opportunity for physical rest	4.02	2.34 ^{cd}	2.07 ^{cd}	5.65 ^{abd}	4.41 ^{abc}	323.76	.000
I would have a sense of comfort and pampering	5.36	3.81 ^{bcd}	4.89 ^{ac}	6.26 ^{abd}	5.29 ^{ac}	91.46	.000
I would have an opportunity to be physically active	4.33	3.63 ^{bc}	5.53 ^{ad}	4.37 ^{abd}	3.46 ^{bc}	63.13	.000
I would have a memorable experience	6.22	5.50 ^{bc}	6.72 ^{ad}	6.62 ^{ad}	5.52 ^{bc}	69.94	.000
I would like to relax away from the ordinary	5.26	4.63 ^{bcd}	6.14 ^{ad}	6.06 ^{ad}	3.58 ^{abc}	194.12	.000
I would have some control over the way things turn out	4.39	3.28 ^{bc}	4.21 ^{ac}	5.26 ^{abd}	3.85 ^c	46.69	.000
I would experience something new	5.53	5.01 ^{bcd}	6.15 ^{ad}	6.36 ^{ad}	4.04 ^{abc}	178.81	.000
I would experience a romantic holiday	4.68	2.80 ^{bcd}	4.98 ^{acd}	5.96 ^{abd}	3.52 ^{abc}	157.15	.000

7 = very important ... 1 = not important at all

Superscript letters next to mean values tell between which segments statistically significant difference is found ($p < .005$).

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.1. Push motivation items with mean values for each cluster.

	Global Sample N=810	I N=100	II N=203	III N=295	IV N=212
Gender ($\chi^2=29.780, p<.001$)					
Male	33.5 %	56.0 %	31.5 %	26.4 %	34.4 %
Female	66.5 %	44.0 %	68.5 %	73.6 %	65.6 %
Age ($\chi^2=36.902, p=.005$)					
Under 18	7.9 %	10.0 %	10.3 %	6.1 %	7.1 %
18-25	48.3 %	50.0 %	53.7 %	52.9 %	35.8 %
26-35	20.4 %	25.0 %	19.2 %	17.3 %	23.6 %
36-45	13.5 %	6.0 %	10.3 %	14.2 %	18.9 %
46-55	7.3 %	6.0 %	5.9 %	6.8 %	9.9 %
56-65	2.1 %	2.0 %	0.5 %	2.0 %	3.8 %
Over 65	0.6 %	1.0 %	-	0.7 %	0.9 %
Region of Residence ($\chi^2=1.836, p=.934$)					
St. Petersburg	48.0 %	46.0 %	45.3 %	48.1 %	51.4 %
Moscow	34.4 %	35.0 %	36.0 %	34.6 %	32.5 %
Other	17.5 %	19.0 %	18.7 %	17.3 %	16.0 %

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics, IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.2. Demographic information of the cluster members

Demographic information for clusters is presented in Table 1.2. A significant difference between clusters was detected regarding gender ($\chi^2=29.780, p<.001$) and age ($\chi^2=36.902, p=.005$). The majority of Memorable Experience Seekers are males. The other segments are female-dominant. In all segments there is a high number of members in age group 18-25. In the segments Memorable Experience Seekers, Active Rural Holidayers and Comfort Seeking Romantics, over half of the members belong to this age group. However, in the segment Casual Rural Holiday Seekers, over 57% of the members are older than 25. No significant difference was found regarding the region of residence between segments.

The most probable companionship during next rural holiday ($\chi^2=49.409, p<.001$)	Global Sample N=810	I N=100	II N=203	III N=295	IV N=212
Spouse / Partner	36.2 %	28.0 %	39.9 %	40.7 %	30.2 %
Family with children under 12 years	9.4 %	4.0 %	10.8 %	7.5 %	13.2 %
Family with children of various ages	11.4 %	7.0 %	4.9 %	12.5 %	17.9 %
Other relatives	3.7 %	4.0 %	4.9 %	3.4 %	2.8 %
Friends	35.1 %	50.0 %	36.0 %	31.5 %	32.1 %
Alone	2.8 %	4.0 %	1.0 %	3.4 %	3.3 %
Other	1.5 %	3.0 %	2.5 %	1.0 %	0.5 %
Suitable duration for a rural holiday ($\chi^2=13.377, p=.034$)					
1 night	3.1 %	6.0 %	2.0 %	3.4 %	2.4 %
2 nights	22.2 %	22.0 %	21.2 %	20.0 %	26.4 %
3-5 nights	45.6 %	43.0 %	44.8 %	46.1 %	46.7 %
6-14 nights	24.4 %	25.0 %	27.6 %	23.7 %	22.2 %
More than 14 nights	4.7 %	4.0 %	4.4 %	6.8 %	2.4 %
Booking of a rural holiday ($\chi^2=20.538, p<.005$)					
Via a travel agent / tour operator	36.7 %	21.0 %	32.0 %	43.7 %	38.7 %
Via online services	26.7 %	36.0 %	28.1 %	22.0 %	27.4 %
Directly from the service provider	36.7 %	43.0 %	39.9 %	34.2 %	34.0 %

Highest value within clusters is bolded.

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.3. Information related to a rural holiday

The respondents were asked who would be the most likely companion to their next rural holiday, what is a suitable duration of a rural holiday and how would they book their rural holiday (Table 1.3). Half of the members in the segment Memorable Experience Seekers would be going on their next rural holiday with friends. In the segments Active Rural Holidayers, Comfort Seeking Romantics and Casual Rural Holiday Seekers the most likely companionship would be either friends or a spouse/partner. Around one third (31.1%) of the respondents in the segment Casual Rural Holiday Seekers would be going on their next rural holiday as a family with children. Regarding booking a rural holiday, a significant difference was found between segments. The segments Memorable Experience Seekers and Active Rural Holidayers consider booking their holiday directly from the service provider, and segments Comfort Seeking Romantics and Casual Rural Holiday Seekers would use a travel agent/tour operator. No significant difference was found in the duration of a rural holiday as 3-5 nights was considered the most suitable for all segments.

Most desired accommodation option for next rural holiday ($\chi^2=56.517, p<.001$)	Global Sample N=810	I N=100	II N=203	III N=295	IV N=212
A room at a hotel	14.0 %	10.0 %	6.9 %	20.0 %	14.2 %
Cottage at tourist complex	27.3 %	27.0 %	28.1 %	29.5 %	23.6 %
Separate cottage (with no close neighbours)	45.2 %	37.0 %	50.2 %	41.4 %	49.5 %
Part of house in a village (accommodation with hosts)	6.2 %	9.0 %	6.4 %	5.4 %	5.7 %
Accommodation in a farm (e.g. renovated barn)	1.6 %	4.0 %	2.5 %	1.0 %	0.5 %
Relatives	2.0 %	3.0 %	1.0 %	0.7 %	4.2 %
Camping area	3.5 %	9.0 %	4.9 %	1.7 %	1.9 %
Other	0.4 %	1.0 %	-	0.3 %	0.5 %

Highest value within clusters is bolded.

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.4. Accommodation related information for each segment

When asked how the respondents would like to be accommodated during their next rural holiday, the most desired option for all segments was a separate cottage (with no close neighbours) (Table 1.4). The second most likely option was a cottage at a tourist complex, followed by a room at a hotel. Half of the members in the segment Active Rural Holidayers would choose a separate cottage.

Wanted accommodation features/accessories	Global Sample N=810	I N=100	II N=203	III N=295	IV N=212	χ^2	p
Water nearby	52.6 %	48.0 %	60.1 %	52.9 %	47.2 %	7.943	.047
Own shore	12.0 %	14.0 %	11.3 %	12.5 %	10.8 %	0.814	.846
Shallow shore	2.3 %	1.0 %	0.5 %	3.1 %	3.8 %	6.361	.095
Own shower	48.4 %	48.0 %	42.4 %	47.5 %	55.7 %	7.547	.056
Indoor toilet	48.3 %	40.0 %	43.8 %	44.1 %	62.3 %	23.046	.000
Gazebo or picnic place	17.7 %	15.0 %	17.7 %	19.3 %	16.5 %	1.241	.743
Pets allowed	4.9 %	5.0 %	6.4 %	3.4 %	5.7 %	2.672	.445
Pets not allowed	1.0 %	2.0 %	1.0 %	1.4 %	-	3.572	.312
Good cross-country skiing tracks nearby	9.1 %	15.0 %	9.9 %	10.5 %	3.8 %	12.281	.006
Location in an island	6.5 %	5.0 %	8.4 %	7.1 %	4.7 %	2.819	.420
Separate place (no neighbouring houses)	12.0 %	16.0 %	12.8 %	8.5 %	14.2 %	6.052	.109
Good fishing opportunities	8.8 %	8.0 %	6.9 %	10.2 %	9.0 %	1.697	.638
Hunting opportunities	3.6 %	2.0 %	3.0 %	5.1 %	2.8 %	3.233	.357
Own sauna	25.9 %	25.0 %	26.1 %	28.5 %	22.6 %	2.237	.525
Free wireless internet	17.0 %	20.0 %	16.3 %	15.9 %	17.9 %	1.082	.782
Electric heating	11.4 %	12.0 %	12.8 %	10.5 %	10.8 %	0.731	.866

Respondents could choose more than one option.

Highest value(s) within clusters is bolded.

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.5. Accommodation related features/accessories for each segment

The respondents were asked to choose important accommodation related features or accessories from the options presented in Table 1.5. No significant differences were observed between the segments, except for an indoor toilet that was considered more important by the segment Casual Rural Holiday Seekers. According to the responses features and accessories, such as own shower, an indoor toilet and the closeness of the accommodation to the body of water are considered important for all segments.

Importance of accommodation related services	Overall mean	I Mean	II Mean	III Mean	IV Mean	F	Sig.
Full board available	4.89	3.74 ^{cd}	4.57 ^c	5.56 ^{abd}	4.82 ^{ac}	25.069	.000
Half board (breakfast and dinner) available	4.58	3.85 ^c	4.36	4.94 ^a	4.63	10.536	.000
An opportunity for full time self-catering	4.38	3.92	4.31	4.55	4.41	2.799	.039
A variety of restaurants available in walking distance	4.88	3.90 ^{cd}	4.61 ^c	5.49 ^{abd}	4.75 ^c	26.910	.000
Local food available	5.14	4.50 ^c	5.11	5.58 ^{ad}	4.86 ^c	15.522	.000
Daily organized program available	4.31	3.26 ^{bc}	4.20 ^{bc}	5.02 ^{abd}	3.94 ^c	31.975	.000
Organized trips and other packages available	4.79	3.86 ^{bc}	4.80 ^a	5.34 ^{ad}	4.43 ^{bc}	23.917	.000
Bicycles, boats etc. available for rent	4.89	4.49	5.20 ^d	5.14 ^d	4.44 ^{bc}	10.867	.000
Hosting company shows environmental responsibility	5.01	4.14 ^{bc}	5.31 ^a	5.30 ^{ad}	4.73 ^c	14.934	.000
My privacy would be assured if I wanted it	4.75	3.94 ^c	4.55 ^c	5.23 ^{abd}	4.64 ^c	15.525	.000
I do not need to rush according to schedules	5.16	4.76	5.00	5.46	5.07	4.609	.003
Calm atmosphere	5.60	4.85^{cd}	5.40 ^c	5.94^{ab}	5.67 ^a	15.049	.000
An opportunity to go to sauna every day	4.79	3.97 ^c	4.50 ^c	5.45 ^{abd}	4.42 ^c	25.662	.000

7 = very important ... 1 = not important at all

Superscript letters next to mean values tell between which segments statistically significant difference is found ($p < .005$).

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.6. Importance of accommodation related services for each segment

Next, the respondents were asked to evaluate accommodation related services on the Likert 7-point scale. An overall inspection of the mean values and the F-value showed that there are no drastic differences between the segments, as most of the items are evaluated at least somewhat important (>4) in almost all segments. However, as an exception, the segment Memorable Experience Seekers tends to value the importance for most items less compared with the overall mean. The biggest differences were observed in the availability of a daily organized program, local food and full board, and also opportunity to go to sauna every day.

Interest for activities during rural holiday	Global Sample N=810	I N=100	II N=203	III N=295	IV N=212	χ ²	P
Organized excursions to local sights / points of interest	37.0 %	27.0 %	34.5 %	36.6 %	44.8 %	10.406	.015
Familiarizing with local culture	28.4 %	24.0 %	33.5 %	27.5 %	26.9 %	3.914	.271
Going to sauna	39.9 %	25.0 %	34.5 %	44.7 %	42.9 %	15.387	.002
Fishing	12.5 %	17.0 %	14.3 %	8.5 %	14.2 %	7.357	.061
Hunting	3.6 %	5.0 %	3.0 %	3.1 %	4.2 %	1.324	.723
Berry or mushroom gathering	8.3 %	7.0 %	3.4 %	9.2 %	12.3 %	11.193	.011
Swimming	33.3 %	29.0 %	31.5 %	36.3 %	33.0 %	2.298	.513
Boating	10.2 %	9.0 %	9.9 %	11.2 %	9.9 %	0.513	.916
Walking / hiking	23.6 %	26.0 %	20.7 %	21.4 %	28.3 %	4.699	.195
Cycling	13.5 %	23.0 %	17.7 %	8.5 %	11.8 %	17.801	.000
Horseback riding	17.9 %	14.0 %	20.2 %	22.0 %	11.8 %	10.575	.014
Cross-country Skiing	7.3 %	11.0 %	8.9 %	5.4 %	6.6 %	4.455	.216
Snowmobiling	9.1 %	11.0 %	8.9 %	8.5 %	9.4 %	0.614	.893
Downhill skiing	7.2 %	12.0 %	6.9 %	6.8 %	5.7 %	4.326	.228
Rafting	4.1 %	8.0 %	2.5 %	4.7 %	2.8 %	6.472	.091
Water sport activities (e.g. hydro cycling, water skiing)	12.2 %	12.0 %	11.8 %	17.6 %	5.2 %	17.843	.000
Indoor sport activities (e.g. tennis, badminton)	7.3 %	8.0 %	7.9 %	6.8 %	7.1 %	0.308	.959
Paintball	4.2 %	9.0 %	5.9 %	3.4 %	1.4 %	11.778	.008
Wildlife watching	7.9 %	12.0 %	8.9 %	7.5 %	5.7 %	4.112	.250

Respondents could choose more than one option

Highest value(s) within clusters is bolded.

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.7. Information on activities for each segment

Several activities for a rural holiday were listed and respondents were asked to choose among them according to their interest (Table 1.7). The most popular activities for all segments were organized excursions to local sights, familiarizing with local culture, sauna, swimming and walking/hiking. Statistical significance ($p < .005$) was found in three activities between the segments: cycling, water sport activities and sauna. Cycling was more important for the segment Memorable Experience Seekers and water sport activities for segment Comfort Seeking Romantics. Going to sauna was more important for others than the segment Memorable Experience Seekers.

Importance of information sources for holiday planning	Overall mean	I Mean	II Mean	III Mean	IV Mean	F	Sig.
Internet	5.95	5.85	5.90	5.98	6.01	0.354	.786
Newspapers	3.14	2.21 ^{cd}	2.38 ^{cd}	3.77 ^{ab}	3.42 ^{ab}	33.342	.000
Magazines	3.53	2.62 ^{cd}	2.97 ^c	4.18 ^{abd}	3.58 ^{ac}	27.238	.000
TV	4.13	3.11 ^{cd}	3.60 ^c	4.74 ^{ab}	4.28 ^a	24.378	.000
Radio	3.11	2.17 ^{cd}	2.62 ^c	3.79 ^{abd}	3.09 ^{ac}	27.535	.000
Outdoor advertising	3.19	2.19 ^{cd}	2.75 ^c	3.97 ^{abd}	3.00 ^{ac}	33.438	.000
Brochures	3.90	2.98 ^{cd}	3.50 ^c	4.53 ^{abd}	3.83 ^{ac}	23.521	.000
Guide books	5.03	4.35 ^{bc}	5.11 ^a	5.39 ^{ad}	4.77 ^c	12.072	.000
Friends and relatives	5.65	5.32	5.73	5.87	5.42	5.092	.002
Travel fairs and exhibits	4.10	3.40 ^c	4.02	4.59 ^{ad}	3.81 ^c	13.659	.000
Previous knowledge	5.53	5.26	5.67	5.76	5.20	5.370	.001
Travel agency / other expert	4.64	3.78 ^c	4.55 ^c	5.18 ^{abd}	4.36 ^c	17.449	.000

7 = very important ... 1 = not important at all

Superscript letters next to mean values tell between which segments statistically significant difference is found ($p < .005$).

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics, IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.8. Importance of information sources for holiday planning in each segment

The importance of different information sources regarding general holiday planning was also inquired (Table 1.8). The most important sources of information for all segments were Internet, friends and relatives and previous knowledge. Also guide books were important for the segments Active Rural Holidayers, Comfort Seeking Romantics and Casual Rural Holiday Seekers. Noticeable differences were found in items outdoor advertising, newspapers, radio and magazines. However, these information sources were generally considered not important or close to neutral opinion. Mixed opinions appeared with TV, brochures, travel fairs/exhibits and travel agency. These were the most important for the segment Comfort Seeking Romantics and least important for the segment Memorable Experience Seekers.

Social media services used in holiday planning	Global Sample N=810	I N=100	II N=203	III N=295	IV N=212
Vkontakte	55.7 %	51.0 %	53.2 %	59.3 %	55.2 %
Одноклассники (Classmates)	11.0 %	6.0 %	3.9 %	16.3 %	12.7 %
Мой Мир@mail.ru	9.1 %	3.0 %	5.4 %	12.2 %	11.3 %
Мой Круг	1.9 %	2.0 %	1.0 %	3.4 %	0.5 %
Facebook	11.9 %	4.0 %	12.8 %	12.9 %	13.2 %
Twitter	5.8 %	6.0 %	2.0 %	8.1 %	6.1 %
YouTube	12.6 %	19.0 %	13.8 %	10.8 %	10.8 %
MySpace	0.9 %	2.0 %	-	1.0 %	0.9 %
Google Maps	42.8 %	53.0 %	50.7 %	38.3 %	36.8 %
Wikipedia	41.7 %	41.0 %	51.2 %	38.6 %	37.3 %
Blogs	22.5 %	19.0 %	24.6 %	21.7 %	23.1 %

Respondents could choose more than one option

Highest value within clusters is bolded.

I = Memorable Experience Seekers, II = Active Rural Holidayers, III = Comfort Seeking Romantics,

IV = Casual Rural Holiday Seekers

Table 1.9. Social media services used in holiday planning for each segment

Regarding Internet as an information source, more specific details about the use of social media services were asked. Table 1.9 presents the information on use of social media services for holiday planning in each segment. The results show that VKontakte is the most frequently used social media service in all segments, followed by Google Maps and Wikipedia. Google Maps is utilized more by the segments Memorable Experience Seekers and Active Rural Holidayers, and Wikipedia most by the segment Active Rural Holidayers. Одноклассники (Classmates) is more popular in the segments Comfort Seeking Romantics and Casual Rural Holiday Seekers.

1.2.5 SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

As a summary to characterize each segment, a typical member of the segment Memorable Experience Seeker is a male, the age of 18-25, who seeks new and memorable experiences and a hassle-free rural holiday. For a holiday he goes to a cottage located near a body of water with his friends, hopes for a calm atmosphere and availability of local food. He is interested in swimming, walking, hiking and going on excursions. Internet, friends, relatives and previous knowledge are his most important information sources when planning his holidays.

Active Rural Holidayer is most probably an 18-25 -year old female, who is motivated to go on a rural holiday to get memorable and new experiences, to

relax away from the ordinary and to being physically active. She looks forward spending a rural holiday with her significant other or possibly with her friends. Her expectations and wants for accommodation are similar to the member of the segment Memorable Experience Seekers, but she considers the possibility to rent bicycles, boats, etc. more important. Also, environmental responsibility for the hosting company is important. She would be interested in excursions, local culture, going to sauna and swimming on her holiday.

Regarding motivations, a Comfort Seeking Romantic seems like I-want-it-all type of traveller. Similar to Active Rural Holidayers, the member of this segment is an 18-25 -year old female who is mostly interested in going on a rural holiday to rest and to relax, to feel a sense of comfort and pampering and also to get new, memorable and possibly romantic experiences. She would go on a holiday with her significant other and accommodate in a cottage, but in some cases possibly choose to stay in a hotel. The vicinity of water is important for her. She is interested in bathing in sauna, swimming and going on excursions.

A Casual Rural Holiday Seeker is similar to Active Rural Holidayer and Comfort Seeking Romantic, a 18-25 -year old female, but in some cases might be somewhat older, the age of 26-35 or 36-45. She is mainly motivated to go on a holiday to have a hassle-free holiday, to escape busy everyday life and spend time with her family. In contrast to the other segments, she is not looking for relaxing away from the ordinary or seeking new experiences. She would most likely go on a rural holiday with her friends, but within this segment there is as good possibility for her significant other or whole family to be her travel companions. A cottage would be her choice for accommodation as well, but the importance of an indoor toilet and a shower is higher for her than for the members of other segments. She is mainly interested in going to sauna and taking part on sightseeing excursions as activities.

1.3 FOLLOW-UP STUDY ABOUT THE DEVELOPED RURAL TOURIST PRODUCTS

A follow-up survey was done after the first survey about potential Russian tourists. The target group for the survey was the participants of the previous study who had given their permission to be contacted for the following study. The aim of this study is to provide insight into the developed rural tourism products, services and attractions focusing on the possible success in creating interesting products and services for the potential Russian rural tourists. The respondents were asked to evaluate the interest by answering if they are or are not interested in visiting the destination or buying the rural tourism package or service. If the respondent was not interested or was considering of purchase by answering 'maybe', s/he had an opportunity to tell the reasons why s/he would consider purchasing and why not.

Seven different rural tourist products and destinations were selected for the survey. All attractions and destinations of these tourist products locate in the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation. Four of these products are sightseeing tours with durations varying from three to five days. The other three rural tourism products are related to wellness and health, active leisure vacation and local culture. Short descriptions of each product are presented in Table 1.10.

Name of the product	Tourism product type	Location	Duration of stay/visit	Accommodation type
"The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk"	Excursion, culture and nature tourism	Medvezhegorsk	3 days	Hotel
Bungalo Spa	Health and wellness services, nature tourism	Sortavala	By agreement	Sauna cabin
"White Nights"	Sport and nature tourism	Suoyarvi	3-7 days	Camping
"Summer trip in the fields of Olonets"	Excursion, culture tourism	Olonets	5 days	Guest houses
Ethnoculture centre "Elämä"	An attraction, culture tourism	Pryazha	1-4 hrs	-
"Karelian Laces"	Excursion, culture tourism	Veshkelitsa-Suoyarvi	3 days	Hotel
Hunting and Fishing in Karelia	Sport and nature tourism	Zaonezhye	By agreement	Guest house

Table 1.10. Summary of the developed rural tourist products

1.3.1 Descriptions of the developed rural tourism products

The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk

This tourism product named as “The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk” is an excursion type tourist product which takes the tourist to visit historic, architectural sites and memorials, and also to nature destinations. Three day program starts with transportation from Petrozavodsk to Medvezhegorsk, where visitors are introduced to the history of the city via visiting the local museum. The excursion program includes also visits to the White Sea canal, war memorials and historic, industrial sites. On the third day, visitors will be taken on a tour to Kivach Nature Reserve and the Kivach Waterfall. The excursion ends in Martsyalnye Vody wellness centre, where visitors can test the healing powers of the local springs. The price for this three-day excursion is 10 000-10 700 rubles depending on the amount of persons. The price includes hotel accommodations, dinners, excursions and transportation.

Bungalo Spa

Bungalo Spa is a Russian style sauna cabin at the shore of Lake Ladoga in Sortavala. Bungalo Spa offers a sauna experience with a variety of aromatherapy and massages. Other services for tourists include fishing, picnics, forest therapy, hiking, boating and private tours to the Valaam Monastery. The price for a stay of one night with spa services is 1750 rubles.

White Nights

The sport and nature tourism package, “White Nights”, offers an active leisure holiday in nature surroundings in the area Lake Tumas near Suoyarvi. The area offers possibilities for activities, such as kayaking, hiking and bicycling. The area also has interesting nature and historic sites. The package can be modified for a family, nature and adventure holiday. The price of a seven-day tour varies from 7500 rubles to 9500 rubles per person depending on the group size, the minimum being eight people. Children under 14 years of age will get a discount.

Summer trip in the fields of Olonets

A culture tourism excursion, “Summer trip on the fields of Olonets”, takes the tourist to the area of Olonets, northeast of Lake Ladoga. During this five-day tour, the tourists visit the villages of Tuloksa, Tuksa, Aleksala, Lemozero and the town Olonets. Activities for the tour can include fishing, boating, birdwatching and getting to know local culture and cuisine. Visitors are accommodated in guest houses in each village. The price for this excursion per

person is 14275 rubles, which includes accommodation, dinners and the excursion program.

Ethno-culture centre “Elämä”

Ethno-culture centre, “Elämä” is an attraction locating in the area of Pryazha. This destination offers various exhibitions about the folk culture of Karelian people. The exhibitions introduce a local handicraft, art and music. The duration of a visit is typically from one hour to four hours. The basic entrance fee is 50 rubles per person. An extended program with workshops is priced at 400 rubles per person.

Karelian Laces

This three-day excursion starts from Petrozavodsk and takes the tourist to the areas of Veshkelitsa and Suoyarvi. The excursion includes a visit to a zoo, a tour in the Karelian village, Veshkelitsa, and visits to several historic, architectonic, cultural and memorial sites in the area of Suoyarvi. The price for the excursion varies from 10900 rubles to 11700 rubles depending on the amount of persons. The price includes hotel accommodation, dinners, excursions and transportation.

Hunting and Fishing in Karelia

In this product, nature and sport based tourism services are offered in the area of Zaonezhye. Accommodation facilities include two guest houses for a maximum of 14 people. The duration of the stay is by agreement with the price of 5000 rubles per night per guest house. The price is negotiable between high seasons. The area offers possibilities for summer activities such as fishing, hunting, wildlife watching, boating, and snowmobile safaris at wintertime. Also various excursions to local attractions can be arranged.

1.3.2 Data collection

The data for the follow-up study was collected via electronic web survey. The questionnaire was sent to those persons, who had taken part of the first study about potential Russian tourists and left their contact information by agreement to be contacted for the follow-up study. 1 119 email invitations were sent successfully. After a week, a reminder message was sent to the same people. Data collection resulted with 69 responses, the response rate being 6.11 per cent.

1.3.3 Results of the study

Demographics of the respondents

Most of the respondents were females (78.3%) (Table 1.11). The most common age class of the respondents was 18 to 29 years old (37.7%), and the area of residence, Saint Petersburg (56.5%).

Gender	%	Age	%
Female	78.3	18-29	37.7
Male	21.7	30-39	23.2
		40-49	20.3
		50-59	11.6
The area of residence	%	60-69	5.8
Saint Petersburg	56.5	Over 70	1.4
Moscow	15.9		
Other	27.5		

Table 1.11. Demographics of the respondents. (N = 69)

Interest for the tourist products

The respondents were asked to give their opinion about their interest in the previously described rural tourism products, packages and destinations (Table 1.12). In two options, 'perhaps, because...' and 'I am not interested in the product, because...', the respondent could give an open explanation why s/he might buy the product in question or why s/he is not interested in the product.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Yes, definitely	60.9 %	59.4 %	53.6 %	55.1 %	73.9 %	53.6 %	62.3 %
Perhaps, because...	30.4 %	24.6 %	18.8 %	27.5 %	11.6 %	27.5 %	20.3 %
I am not interested of the product, because ...	8.7 %	15.9 %	26.1 %	15.9 %	14.5 %	18.8 %	17.4 %
(Missing)	-	-	1.4 %	1.4 %	-	-	-

- I** The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk
- II** Bungalo Spa
- III** White Nights tour
- IV** Summer trip in the fields of Olonets
- V** Ethno-culture centre, "Elämä"
- VI** Karelian Laces
- VII** Hunting and Fishing in Karelia

Table 1.12. Summary of the opinions on the interest in the rural tourist products

Comments about *The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk*

On the basis of the respondents' opinions, *The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk* seemed to be the most interesting product, as 61 per cent of the respondents are definitely interested in the product and 30 per cent of the respondents would consider buying the package tour. The features that make this product interesting, on the basis of the comments, are the history and nature of the Medvezhegorsk region. The duration of the excursion seems suitable, and for some respondents, this is an area that they have not visited before. Those who are not interested in this product commented that this type of tourist product is not for them. They also questioned the transportation options and wondered why the tour starts from Petrozavodsk.

Comments about *Bungalo Spa*

According to the respondents, Bungalo Spa is an interesting and unique attraction that offers compelling health services and optional programs. For those who were not interested in Bungalo Spa, accommodating in a cabin was nothing special or they were unsure about the comfort of that type of accommodation.

Comments about *White Nights tour*

As this product's program heavily emphasizes leisure sport activities, some of the respondents considered this product not to be suitable for them. Also camping as an accommodation was seen as an obstacle to take this tour. However, these were also wanted features for some respondents. Being in the nature was also seen as a one of the strengths of this tourist product.

Comments about *Summer Trip in the Fields of Olonets*

For this excursion, the most interesting features were the culture related activities and bird watching. Also, the possibility to accommodate a larger group of people was seen positive. The respondents who were not interested in this tourism package said that the area or the program was not that fascinating and this type of excursion could be arranged independently.

Comments about the *ethno-culture centre, "Elämä"*

The respondents commented that this attraction would be suitable for children and families. However, the theme of the destination can be seen as a limitation and the exhibitions seemed somewhat one-sided for some respondents.

Comments about *Karelian Laces*

The cultural and historic aspects of this excursion seem as the highlights for some and downsides to others. Most comments by those who were not interested were that the theme of the excursion was not appealing.

Comments about *Hunting and Fishing in Karelia*

Like the comments for *White Nights* tour, this product also divided opinions concerning the attractiveness of the activities in the destination. Those who were not interested in fishing or hunting did not consider this product right for them. Those who could possibly consider purchasing this product commented that the extra services and programs could be interesting. The freedom to choose the daily program was seen as a positive aspect.

Opinions about price compared to the product offering

After evaluating their interests, the respondents were asked to tell their opinion about the price of the product. In Table 1.13, the information about price evaluations is presented for each product.

Evaluation of the product price	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
The price is inexpensive	10.1 %	24.6 %	14.5 %	4.3 %	59.4 %	4.3 %	8.7 %
The price is suitable	56.5 %	59.4 %	72.5 %	30.4 %	40.6 %	30.4 %	60.9 %
The price is too high	33.3 %	15.9 %	11.6 %	63.8 %	-	65.2 %	30.4 %
(Missing)	-	-	1.4 %	1.4 %	-	-	-

- I The Secrets of Medvezhegorsk
- II Bungalo Spa
- III White Nights tour
- IV Summer trip in the fields of Olonets
- V Ethno-culture centre, "Elämä"
- VI Karelian Laces
- VII Hunting and Fishing in Karelia

Table 1.13. Evaluation of the product price compared to the product offering

For almost all products, the price is seen suitable when compared with the offering in the product description. For the excursion products, *Summer Trip on the Fields of Olonets* and *Karelian Laces*, the respondents think that the price might be too high in comparison with the program offering.

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2 Social media marketing of tourism products through Russian social media channel VKontakte: Case study from Finland and the Republic of Karelia

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

2.1.1 Study background

Today Russia is the most important target market for Finnish tourism industry. From the practical marketing point of view, Russian tourism in Finland is a current topic. It is argued that Russians keep the tourism of Finland alive. According to the Border Interview Survey 2012 by Statistics Finland and Finnish Tourist Board (Statistics Finland, 2013), visitors from Russia are the largest visitor group. The amount of visitors from Russia was 3.6 million in 2012. Travel from Russia to Finland increased by ten per cent compared with the year 2011.

Malankin (2012) studied over 200 works about Russians and offers her view about their travelling habits, consumer behaviour and expectations. She describes Russian tourists as open, curious and spontaneous. Russians do not really plan their holidays, they look through the information they can find and make their decision right away. Finland is criticized by Russians for the lack of information. During their holidays, Russians are used to spending money, drinking and eating well. They are surprised with rather peaceful nightlife in Finland and lack of activities offered to them. As all clients, generally, also Russians like to be extremely valued, they appreciate it significantly (Malankin, 2012).

Nowadays Russia is one of the biggest suppliers of tourists to the foreign market (Furmanov, Balaeva & Predvoditeleva, 2012, 2-3). According to the

Federal State Statistics Service of Russia (2013), in the year of 2012, the most popular travel destinations for Russians were Finland (+18%), Turkey (-6%) and China. According to the Russia Tourism Strategy to 2020 (Ministry of Culture of Russian Federation, 2013), Russia was in the top ten list for the leader countries of tourist arrivals and the fifth for the tourists' consuming in 2012. Russia is on its way to build a unique tourism industry consisting of natural, social, economic, cultural and historical resources. Domestic tourism should be affordable for the Russians. Nowadays people with an average income often choose outbound destination for the "quality-price" criteria (Boiko, 2009). In this study, the focus is on tourism in Russia and in Finland through the social media channel VKontakte (hereinafter abbreviated as VK).

2.1.2 Objectives of the study

The object of this study is social media groups connected to Finnish and Karelian tourism in the most popular channel VK of Russia. The main research questions are:

- What kind of groups can be found in VK that are connected to the tourism to Finland and what are the main topics that people discuss?
- What kind of groups can be found in VK that are connected to the tourism to the Republic of Karelia and what are the main topics people discuss?
- What kind of advice on marketing can be given to, a) the tourism entrepreneurs in Finland, and b) the tourism entrepreneurs of the Republic of Karelia, based on knowledge from these groups?

2.2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND MARKETING

The promotion effectiveness for organizations in social media is quite new. Researchers have just started to examine different social media platforms and their impact on the promotional aims of organization (Paek, Hove, Jung & Cole, 2013). Started as an entertainment tool social media is widely used for business purposes because of time, audience, relation and costs (Kirtiř & Karahan, 2011).

There is still no complete definition for social media, which would be agreed by all parties (Zhu & Wang, 2013). Safko and Brake (2009, 6) define social media as "activities, practices, among the communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media". Conversational media is a Web-based tool that helps to create and transmit content in the form of words, pictures, video and audio (Safko & Brake, 2009). Kirtiřa and Karahan (2011) suggest that in social media, a group of internet-based service users interact with other users online through blogs, share contents and communicate with friends over a social network.

According to Safko and Brake (2009), the most important purpose of the social media, from the business point of view, is to engage the audience. They

define the four categories of engagement with social media: communication, collaboration (special social media tools for collaboration among work teams, buyers and sellers, companies and customers), education (customer education and employee training) and entertainment (entertainment definitely helps to sell products).

2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA IN RUSSIA

TNS is the leading media and market research company in Russia and it provides internet statistics for the Russian market monthly. As shown in Figure 2.1, in October 2013, 44.2 million people (12 years and older) used internet at least once a month and 42.4 million people at least once a week (TNS Russia, 2013).

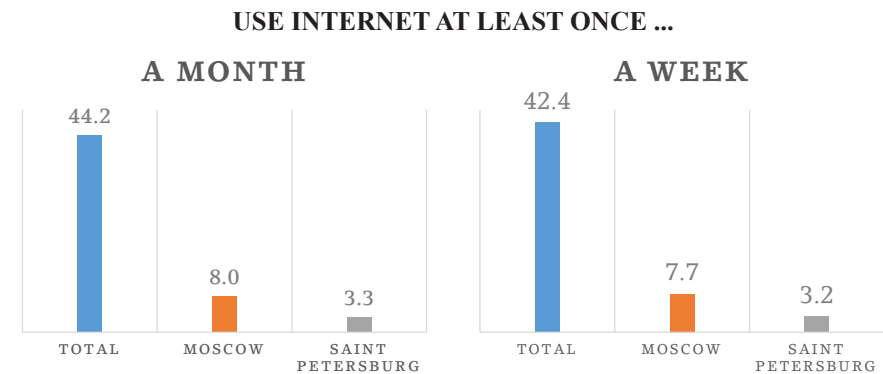


Figure 2.1. The number of Internet users. October 2013. (TNS Russia, 2013).

During the past few years, the number of Internet users in Russia increased 17% in 2010-2011 and 12% in 2011-2012. Almost all users (94%) have access to Internet at home (Yandex, 2013).

Top 20 Sites in Russia	Total Unique Visitors (000)	% Growth	Avg. Minutes per Visitor	Avg. Pages per Visitor
Total Internet Audience: Age 15+	61,345	15	1 565.0	2,938
Mail.ru Group	52,396	17	371.1	733
Yandex Sites	52,124	16	91.6	173
Google Sites	45,838	21	97.9	94
Vk.com	43,959	19	390.7	612
Microsoft Sites	27,370	47	16.9	12
Wikimedia Foundation Sites	25,750	17	14.4	14
Ucoz Web Services	23,900	12	5.7	13
Ros BusinessConsulting	20,073	-2	22.8	32
Rambler Media	18,383	2	23.5	33
Avito.ru	16,402	60	37.2	83
SUP Meida	15,891	9	16.2	20
Facebook.com	14,675	25	29.0	54
Gazprom Media	13,189	5	9.3	12
Technorati Media	13,133	37	2.8	5
Map Makers Sites (Gismeteo)	10,971	81	11.0	18
MIH Limited	10,851	101	13.1	26
Kinopoisk.ru	10,363	40	12.8	19
LiveInternet	9,159	6	7.0	14
VGTRK Sites	8,339	28	12.5	16
Pronto Moscow	8,313	25	9.5	18

Table 2.1. Top 20 sites in Russia. December 2012. (comScore, 2013)

Mail.ru Group is the most popular site in Russia (Table 2.1). The products of Mail.ru consist of email and portal services, social networks, instant messaging, online games, search and e-commerce and other communication and entertainment platforms (Wikipedia, 2014). Yandex is the largest search engine in Russia and provides internet-based services and products: web search, free mail hosting, mapping service, a transaction service similar to PayPal, and various productivity-enhancing apps (Clay, 2013).

According to the TNS statistics (2013) the market leader of the social media is VK with over 40 million users (Table 2.1). VK is a social network that originated in Russia in 2006 and became extremely popular among users from post-Soviet countries. VK is a Russian version of Facebook. In Russia, globally succeeded Facebook has its lowest penetration in Europe at 18.8 per cent, currently ranking behind leaders VK, Odnoklassniki and Mail.ru (comScore, 2013).

As for the site structure, VK resembles Facebook greatly. Each user has its

own profile. In addition, one can create a “group profile” and invite fans there. A membership in those groups can be open for everybody or private, meaning that people can only join by invitation.

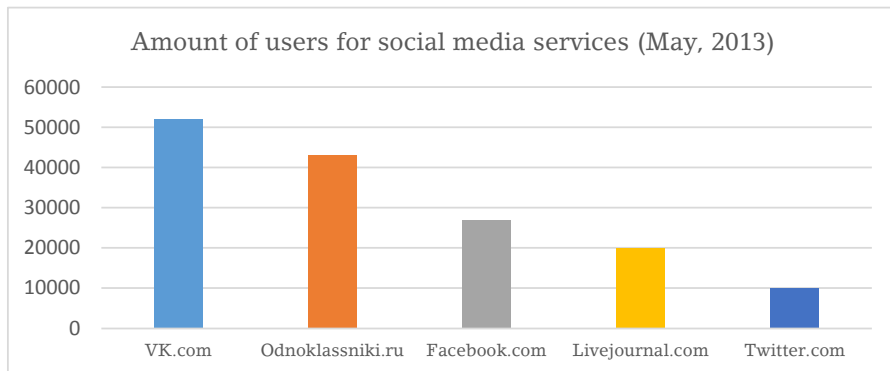


Figure 2.2. Russian social media audience (TNS Web Index, 2013)

Odnoklassniki means “schoolmates” and was founded in 2006 as a part of the Mail.ru platform. This channel focuses on sharing photographs and is full of flashing images. Users can rate other peoples’ photos, chat and get the information on who has viewed their profile. Facebook became popular when it started to use a Russian interface. The user profile among Russians in Facebook is young people who have friends abroad. Livejournal, owned by SUP media, differs from the other social media channels with the profile of the online community where users can keep their blogs, diary or journal. Twitter enables users to do profile updates and microblogging, to send and read “tweets”.

2.4 GROUPS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The growth of the use of social media forces businesses to accept it as a communication channel to stay in touch with their present and potential clients. Among different tools used in social media, the most effective one is the creation of a group. The purpose of a group is to gather people with shared interests to discuss issues. The group is used as a platform for communication. It is not quite effective to create a group just around a brand. Users probably would not be interested in a Colgate toothpaste but everybody is interested in how to keep your teeth healthy. Therefore, advertising should not be too straight. There are different strategies for creating a group: 1) by the company and hosted by the company workers 2) by the company and hosting is outsourced to an agency, 3) unofficially by the company workers, and 4) by the active users (Danchenok & Nevostuev, 2011).

2.5 RESEARCH & RESULTS

2.5.1 Groups in VK connected to tourism to Finland

At the beginning of the study, the groups in VK devoted to tourism in Finland were searched and about 10 000 were found. The choosing criteria were based on the name (should have "Finland" in it), content (devoted to those who travel to Finland, not living in the country) and the number of members in the group (only groups with more than 3000 members got in the list). The first group analysis was done in April 2013 and updated in November 2013.

According to the list presented in Table 2.2, groups can be divided into four subgroups according to what kind of information is delivered and transmitted in the group discussions:

- Subgroup 1: General information about Finland (Shopping, Sales and Rest in Finland, The land of Finland, Finland, Finland Guide, Stop in Finland).
- Subgroup 2: Information about certain region in Finland (Finland in VKontakte – visit Mikkeli, Finland/Lappeenranta and Imatra Region/GoSaimaa, About Helsinki, Finland/Himos).
- Subgroup 3: The group is devoted to shopping and contains plenty of advertisements (Check in Finland – the best holiday in Finland).
- Subgroup 4: The group is devoted to entertainment and is unfocused (To conquer Finland, Fuck yeah Finland).

GROUPS IN VKONTAKTE RELATED TO TOURISM IN FINLAND			NUMBER OF MEMBERS	
NAME OF THE GROUP / VKONTAKTE NAME	DESCRIPTION	MODERATED BY	APR 2013	NOV 2013
Finland in VKontakte, visit Mikkeli <i>Финляндия VKontakte, Миккели VisitMikkeli.fi</i>	http://vk.com/visitmikkeli , support for the site: www.visitmikkeli.fi Popular group for tourists, the most of the new members are from Mikkeli region	Marko Riabkov marko.riabkov@miset.fi Mikkeli, Finland	14599	14281 (-318)
Shopping sales, trips and rest in Finland <i>Шопинг, скидки, поездки и отдых в Финляндии!</i>	http://vk.com/checkfinland Group that offers useful information about Finland, what to do, where to go and what to see.	Jari Tapanainen jari.tapanainen@b4u.fi Finland and Russia	9027	16968 (+7941)
Finland <i>Финляндия</i>	http://vk.com/finland_suomi Support for the site: www.russian.fi Finnish news, sales, cultural offers, possibility to ask questions, not well-structured	Konstantin Kuranov http://vk.com/konstantin.kuranov Finland	8449	8776 (+327)
To conquer Finland <i>Взять Финлянд ию на бордаж!</i>	http://vk.com/club22298 , support for the site: www.findeal.ru Finnish news, advertisements of private people offering services connected to Finland, not focused.	In December 2013, the group did not exist anymore Saint Petersburg, Russia	8067	7614 (-453)
Finland/Lappeenranta and Imatra Region/GoSaimaa <i>Финляндия Регион Лappeenranta и Иматра GoSaimaa</i>	http://vk.com/gosaimaa , support for the site: www.gosaimaa.com Information on the activities in South Finland. Works as an online customer services in Russian for those interested of Lappeenranta.	Alla Niemi, Mika Tonder lapeenranta@gosaimaa.com Russia	6873	21702 (+14829)
Stop in Finland. Truth about Finland <i>Stop in Finland - вся правда о Финляндии!</i>	http://vk.com/stopinfin , support for the site: www.stopinfin.ru/ News about shopping, activities, culture in Helsinki, well-structured.	Irina Myagkova sales@stopinfin.ru Saint Petersburg, Russia	6376	6113 (-263)
About Helsinki, capital city with style <i>Про Хельсинки! Про Столицу со вкусом™ Helsinki</i>	http://vk.com/prohelsinki , support for the site: www.helsinki.ru News about shopping, activities, culture in Helsinki, well-structured.	Artur Kukov http://vk.com/archeemayday Helsinki, Finland	6297	8473 (+2176)
The land of Finland <i>Suomi maa</i>	http://vk.com/stranafi , support for the site: www.strana.fi Tourism oriented group, peaceful, well-structured, many pictures of Finnish nature and different places in Finland	(Unknown) Phone number: +358103222220 Saint Petersburg, Russia	6165	9698 (+3533)
Fuck yeah, Finland! <i>Vittu Joo, Suomi!</i>	http://vk.com/suomifyeah The group is full of entertaining stuff: Finnish music, films, design.	Nikolai Kulchenko http://vk.com/snowbl1nd Russia	5947	7342 (+1395)
Finland/Himos/Downhill Skiing Resort <i>Финляндия Himos Химос Горнолыжный курорт</i>	http://vk.com/himosholiday , support for the site: www.himosholiday.ru The group about activities in Himos all over the year.	Elias Toimelias http://vk.com/id125149105 Finland	4547	4238 (-309)
Finland guide. I leave for Finland. <i>Путеводитель по Финляндии - Я е ду в Финляндию.</i>	http://vk.com/club6361288 , support for the site: www.igotofin.ru The group is closed, I wait for my acception to the group to see what the group is about	Irina Nikushkina http://vk.com/nika_lucky Saint Petersburg, Russia	4905	4951 (+46)
Check in Finland - the best holiday in Finland! <i>Check in Finland - лучший отдых в Финляндии</i>	http://vk.com/checkinfinland , support for the site: www.checkinfinland.ru The group is oriented on shopping in Finland, plenty of advertising, not much tourist information	Check-In Finland http://vk.com/id165237362 Lappeenranta, Finland	3097	3054 (+407)

Table 2.2. Groups in VK connected to tourism to Finland: vk.ru

2.5.2 Changes in the amount of members

In November 2013, the most popular groups belonged to the subgroups 1 and 2. In the subgroup 1, advertising is presented in articles and blogs not in straight advertisements. The content of these groups gives a possibility to many tourism entrepreneurs to offer information about their services: shopping, seasonal tourist activities, cultural attractions, accommodation, competitions, discussions and advertisements. As we can see from the contact information in Table 2.2 moderation of the group is organized by a person from Finland or Russia.

In several groups the amount of users changed critically from April to November. The amount of users grew in such groups as "Shopping, sales, trips and rest in Finland" (+7941 users), "Finland/Lappeenranta and Imatra region/Go Saimaa" (+14829 users), "The land of Finland" (+3533 users).

For the group, "To conquer Finland", the amount of users had decreased (-453) and in December 2013, it did not exist. "Finland in VKontakte, visit Mikkeli" (-318 users), "Finland/Himos/Downhill skiing" (-309 users) are groups that support special region or resort in Finland. The decrease of users could be explained with the fact that users were not so well activated by the moderators with questions, advice or competitions. It is likely that no advertising budget was used for promoting the group. Naturally, user amounts increase close to New Year's season and stay quite constant during non-tourism seasons.

2.5.3 Discussion topics

The most popular topics were analysed inside the groups connected to tourism in Finland (Table 2.3). Data was gathered in April-May 2013. Groups from Table 2.2 were analysed and the most popular topics were chosen on the basis of the amount of comments. Only the topics with over 20 comments were chosen. One topic often consisted of several discussions.

All discussions were created by the moderators of the groups. The Russian members of the groups (from Finland or Russia) answered, asked questions and continued discussions.

GROUP NAME / NAME IN VKONTAKTE	MEMBERS NOV. 2013	TOPIC	COMMENTS	AMOUNT OF COMMENTS
Finland Финляндия	8776	Healthcare in Finland	Prices for health care, insurance, medicine, surgery, feedback, doctors (their educational level and proficiency)	22
		Shopping	Prices, brands, sale, clothes for young persons, wedding dresses, Swan's down coats, loyalty customer cards, shops and shopping center, low-price shops: where?, sport equipment, delivery of goods, tax free - invoice	98
Check in Finland- the best holiday in Finland! Check in Finland - лучший отдых в Финляндии	3504	What did surprise you in Finland?	Comfortable traffic and clear traffic signs, honesty and friendliness of people, clean and peaceful cities, clear water, beautiful nature, ecology, reindeers	40
		Questions and answers about Finland	Visas, attractions, spa, parks, holidays with children, accommodation, traffic, sale, opening hours of shops, boat trips from Finland, plane tickets from Finland, parking in Finland, museums	74
Stop in Finland. Truth about Finland Stop in Finland - вся правда о Финляндии!	6113	To Finland by car	Border rules, traffic, motorbikes in Finland, parking, fines	29
		Public transport in Helsinki	Season tickets, tickets/prices and where to buy, travel cards, timetable, getting to the airport, bus stops	71
Finland in Vkontakte, visit Mikkeli Финляндия ВКонтакте, Миккели VisitMikkeli.fi	14281	Accommodation	What, where; Prices; Where to stay near Mikkeli	25

Table 2.3. Discussions in VK about tourism in Finland: vk.ru

The topics which gathered more than 20 comments were examined. The discussions concentrated on topics such as health care in Finland, shopping, things that surprised tourists in Finland, questions and answers about Finland, traffic and accommodation.

Shopping

The most popular topic that gathered 98 comments is shopping. People gave the addresses of good shops with cheap prices and high-level brands. Out of all shopping products, the most attention was paid to Swan's down coats, wed-

ding dresses and sport equipment:

Н.Д.: Скажите а какую цену пуховики стоят финские???? мы в начале января собирается поехать...

N.D.: *What are the prices for Finnish swan's down coats???? We are going to travel at the beginning of January... (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1315875?offset=20)*

А.Ш.: Хотим поехать 19 декабря, подскажите где можно купить в Хельсинки горнолыжные костюмы (дешево)?

A.S.: *We are going to travel on 19 of December, where can we buy sport clothes in Helsinki? (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1315875?offset=40)*

People also needed more information on the tax free and invoice systems:

Т.В.: Regina, я не поняла, про возврат НДС, это как? Неужели на таможне проверяют все?

T.V.: *Regina, I didn't actually understand, what is this VAT refund system? Do they really check everything on the boarder? (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1315875?offset=80)*

Health care

Health care in Finland gathered 22 comments. People were interested in prices, possibilities to give birth in Finland and surgeries of a different kind:

Е.О.: Валентина, здр-те! Своего первенца рожала в Ф. Всё было на высшем уровне и обслуживание, внимание со стороны персонала. Только один позитиф как у меня так и у мужа.

E.O.: *Valentina, hi! I gave birth to my first baby in Finland. Everything was on high level, service, attention from the nurses. With my husband, we got only positive emotions. (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1339228)*

The level of proficiency of Finnish doctors did not get much positive attention:

Ю.К.: da dejstvitelno s medicinoj tut slabo. detyam v krajnem sluchae panadol, vzroslim toge v krajnem sluchae panadol a esli sovsem xerovo to antibiotiki, pri etom tebya ne osmatrivayut, nichego ne wupayut i ne berut analizov.

J.K.: *Really the level of medicine here is very weak. Children always get Panadol, adults get Panadol as well, if the situation is really serious then they give you antibiotics, but they don't examine you or do any tests. (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1339228)*

А.О.: В Финляндии при любой проблеме вам выдают Burana или Panadol.

A.O.: *In Finland for any kind of problems you always get Burana or Panadol. (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1339228)*

Despite the situation with the Finnish doctors, Russians were satisfied with the level of technical equipment in Finnish hospitals:

Е.О.: Светлана, правильно вам написали, финские больницы оснащены на уровне...

Е.О.: *Svetlana, you've been told right, Finnish hospitals are well-equipped... (http://vk.com/topic-19035_1339228)*

Positive surprises

Things that surprised tourists in Finland were aspects connected to traffic culture: good roads, drivers obeying the rules and reindeer walking down the streets:

Т.К.: При первом приезде в Финляндию поразила меня организация дорожного движения на перекрестках! Нам бы такое в СПб!

Т.К.: *When I first came to Finland I was surprised how traffic is organized on the crossroads! I wish we had the same in Saint Petersburg! (http://vk.com/topic-31796237_27334999)*

Clean nature, tap water that everyone can drink, peacefulness and friendliness of people in Finland were also issues discussed under the topic, "what surprised you in Finland?"

И.А.: В первую очередь меня поразила экология страны, чистота, порядок. Даже вокзал мне показался самым чистым во всей Европе, как только я ступила на перрон. Вода чистейшая, которую можно пить из под крана, качественные продукты, которые мне по душе. Конечно, люди- на первый взгляд очень сдержанные, воспитанные и доброжелательные.

И.А.: *First of all I was impressed by the ecology of the country, cleanliness, order everywhere. Even the railway station was so clean, I think the cleanest in the whole Europe. Water is also very clean, you can drink it straight out of the tap. There are very high level products in here that I like. From the first impression people are calm, well-behaved and friendly. (http://vk.com/topic-31796237_27334999)*

Questions and answers about Finland

Under the topic, Questions and answers about Finland, there was discussion on such issues as visas, accommodation, traffic, sales, tickets, parking rules, and holiday activities. Group members gave advice to each other and compared how differently things were organized in Finland and Russia:

Е.Р.: Сколько времени нужно для открытия визы в Финляндию? Спаибо.

Е.Р.: *How much time do I need to get a Finnish visa? Thank you.*

Л.А.: Добрый день! Можно ли посетить художественную галерею Ретретти в Пункахарью? К сайту доступа нет. Открыта ли она? Если да, есть ли какое-либо расписание?

L.A.: Good afternoon! Is it possible to visit the art gallery Retretti in Punkaharju? The web site doesn't work. Is the gallery open? What are the open hours?

Other topics connected to transport were, "getting to Finland by car" and "public transport in Helsinki".

2.5.4 Groups in VK connected to tourism to the Republic of Karelia

In April 2013, about 5000 groups with the word "Karelia" in their title were found in VK. 13 groups were connected to the Republic of Karelia as a tourist destination and had over 3000 members. These 13 groups were analysed in this study. The first two, "Karelia: Petrozavodsk" and "Karelia - 21 century/ Petrozavodsk", are built mostly around the issues happening in the capital of the Republic of Karelia – Petrozavodsk. Furthermore, the groups which are used as a promotional channel for firms offering cottage rental services are the following: "Karelia: Rest in the comfortable cottages down the lake", "Cottages, rest, excursions and fishing in Karelia" and "Rest in Karelia: cottages, fishing, hunting".

Tour operators offering package tours and activity services also use VK as a promotional channel in the groups "Active holiday in Karelia", "Rest in Karelia" and "Travel agency Karelia". Groups for people just interested in Karelia and its nature, consist of plenty of discussions and some advertising materials. These groups are "Karelia", "Ladoga lake", "Karelia: active holiday in Karelia" and "Karelia! Ladoga lake! Skerries!".

Groups in VKontakte related to tourism in the Republic of Karelia			APRIL 2013
NAME OF THE GROUP	DESCRIPTION	MODERATED BY	MEMBERS
Karelia: Petrozavodsk <i>Карелия: Петрозаводск</i>	http://vk.com/petrozavodsk News about Petrozavodsk	Sergey Zagorski http://vk.com/sergeyzagorcki Petrozavodsk, Russia	40744
Karelia-21 century/ Petrozavodsk <i>Карелия - 21 Век/ Петрозаводск</i>	http://vk.com/karelia_xxi_vek News about Petrozavodsk, the most beautiful places in the Republic of Karelia.	Timur Vehkavichus http://vk.com/timmini Petrozavodsk, Russia	26267
Karelia: Rest in the comfortable cottages down the lake <i>Карелия: Отдых и уютных коттеджей на берегу реки</i>	http://vk.com/club5431137 The group is created for private company purposes to support the renting cottages business, many pictures of the Republic of Karelia	Galina Lezneva http://vk.com/id23153114 Saint Petersburg, Russia	18102
Cottages, rest, excursions and fishing in Karelia <i>Коттеджа, Отдых, экскурсии и Рыбалка и Карелии</i>	http://vk.com/munozero The group is created for private company purposes to support the renting cottages business in the area of lake Munozero	Maksim Mjagkij tocsatama@gmail.com Russia	13530
Karelia <i>Карелия</i>	http://vk.com/karelia_otdih General information about RK, support for the site: www.karjalan.ru	Nadezda Tikkoeva contact@karjalan.ru Republic of Karelia, Russia	13138
Rest in Karelia. Tours, Accommodation, Hotels. <i>Отдых и Карелии. Туры. База отдыха. Гостиничы.</i>	http://vk.com/all_karelia Official group for the private company, offering cottages and other touristic services, http://baza-karelii.ru/	Svetlana Dmitrieva http://vk.com/id20714296 Saint Petersburg, Russia	9025
Ladoga Lake <i>Ладожское озеро</i>	http://vk.com/club19649 Group for people who have fell in love with Lake Ladoga or are interested in Karelian nature. Plenty of pictures and discussion	Alexey Dunkov http://vk.com/id59013 Saint Petersburg, Russia	6743
Active holidays in Karelia <i>Активный отдых и Карелии</i>	http://vk.com/karelia.activetravel Official group for the private company offering activity services for tourists: www.activetravel.ru	Alexsandr Redkin http://vk.com/id3827949 Petrozavodsk, Russia	5911
Rest in Karelia <i>Отдых и Карелии</i>	http://vk.com/club2651460 Official group for the private company offering activity services for tourists	Albert Gorbachev http://vk.com/karelia Medvezhyegorsk, Russia	5554
Travel agency "Karelia" <i>Туристическая компания Карелия</i>	http://vk.com/club44077146 Official group for a tour operator offering package tours, http://www.t-karelia.ru	Irina Borisova tkarelia1@mail.ru Kondopoga, Russia	5323
Karelia: active holiday in Karelia <i>Карелия!!! Активный отдых и Карелии.</i>	http://vk.com/club12281 Group for people who are interested in Karelia and spending a holiday in Karelia. Information about the region.	Albert Gorbachev http://vk.com/karelia Republic of Karelia, Russia	4429
Karelia! Ladoga lake! Skerries! <i>Карелия! Ладожское озеро!Шхеры!</i>	http://vk.com/ladoga812 Group for people who are interested in the history and geography of Karelia and the skerries in Lake Ladoga	Tatjana Volodina http://vk.com/id207821497 Saint Petersburg, Russia	3432

Table 2.4. Groups in VK related to tourism in the Republic of Karelia

2.5.5 Discussion topics

The most popular topics analysed within the selected groups were connected to tourism to the Republic of Karelia (Table 2.5). The data was gathered in November 2013. The groups in Table 2.4 were analysed and the most popular topics were chosen on the basis of the amount of comments. Only topics with at least 40 comments were selected. One topic often consisted of several discussions. The discussion was started by moderators or group members.

GROUP	MEMBERS NOV. 2013	TOPIC	COMMENTS	NR. OF COMMENTS
Karelia: active holiday in Karelia <i>Карелия!!! Активный отдых и Карелии.</i>	4429	Where to go in Karelia?	How to get to specific destinations by a car and other transportation The best lake in Karelia Attractions Prices Accommodation Best fishing, where?	127
Karelia! Ladoga lake! Skerries! <i>Карелия! Ладожское озеро!Шхеры!</i>	3432	Hotels and other accommodation in Karelia	Best tour operators Best cottages to rent Hostels	88
Cottages, rest, excursions and fishing in Karelia <i>Коттеджа, Отдых, экскурсии и Рыбалка и Карелии</i>	13530	Water trip in Karelia	Canoe trips Best lakes for canoe trips Water safety issues	65
Travel agency "Karelia" <i>Туристическая компания Карелия</i>	5323	Where to go in Karelia?	Best peaceful place Fishing permission Good roads	63
Ladoga Lake <i>Ладожское озеро</i>	6743	Ruskeala	What to see in Ruskeala? What to do in Ruskeala? How to get to Ruskeala? Where to stay?	40
Rest in Karelia <i>Отдых и Карелии</i>	5554	Rent a cottage without electricity	Unique chance to rent a cottage in a village without electricity and neighbours	40
Rest in Karelia: cottages, fishing, hunting <i>Отдых и арелии: коттеджи,рыбалка, охота</i>	9025	Where to go in the Republic of Karelia during self-organised trip?	Beautiful place where one can get by him/herself Activities Public transport	33

Table 2.5. Discussion topics in VK about tourism to the Republic of Karelia: vk.ru

Most of the people discuss different places where to go in Karelia alone, with friends or with the family. They were interested in different kind of holiday from cheap to the expensive ones, in winter and in summer:

К.З.: Сергей, Здравствуйте! Подскажите пожалуйста место на Сямозере, куда можно проехать на машине, отдохнуть и порыбачить. Заранее спасибо...

К.З.: *Sergey, hello! Could you help please, where to go in Samozero, where we can get by car, have rest, to fish? Thanks in advance...* (http://vk.com/topic-12281_10842?offset=120)

Many tourists wanted to stay in calm places with no neighbours:

М.Б.: Альберт, посоветуйте красивое тихое место вдали от цивилизации, зимняя рыбалка, лыжи и т.д. спасибо!

М.Б.: *Albert, we need beautiful, peaceful place, far from the civilization, winter fishing, skiing etc. Thanks!* (http://vk.com/topic-12281_10842?offset=60)

А.К.: Ищу место в Карелии, не дальше 600км от Питера. Красивое и чтобы туристов было по минимуму. Для отдыха с палатками. Труднодоступность места, очень важна, чем сложнее доехать, тем меньше туристов.

А.К.: *I search for the place in Karelia, not more than 600 km from Saint Petersburg with minimum amount of tourists, for staying under canvas. The more difficult to get there the better, that means less tourists.* (http://vk.com/topic-12281_21031660)

Many users told about the most beautiful places in the Republic of Karelia they had visited:

Н.А.: Интересные места в северной Карелии, Заонежье...

Н.А.: *Interesting places in Karelia situated in Zaonezhye...* (http://vk.com/topic-12281_10842?offset=60)

Hotels and other accommodation

The group members were asked to write an opinion on different accommodation variants in Karelia and accommodation providers. During this discussion, people wrote their impressions about hotels, hostels and different firms organizing accommodations:

А.В.: Вчера гостили вот здесь: п. Матросы, ш. Пряжинское, 106, Гостевой дом (Скиф тур). Ездили специально покататься на собачьих упряжках. В самом доме очень уютно, домашняя атмосфера.

А.В.: *Yesterday we stayed in the village Matrosi, Prjazinskaja Street 106, Guest House (Skif Tour). We went on dog safari. It is very comfortable inside, you feel like at home.* (http://vk.com/topic-12281_1297646)

Trips to Karelia

Trips of different kind were discussed under the topics, “water trips in Karelia” and “where to go during the self-organised trip in Karelia?”. Most of the members asked for advice related to a specific destination or a place.

К.А.: Подскажите если ктонибудь знает, стоит ли брать тур с инструктором, если мы собираемся в водный поход или же лучше самим, хотя ни у кого нет опыта?

К.А.: *Could someone tell, is it better to take an instructor for the water tour, or is it better to go by ourselves, but we don't have any experience? (http://vk.com/topic-12281_1389579)*

С.М.: Всем привет!!!! Подскажите, кто знает, оптимальные пару-тройку маршрутов в Карелии для первого раза на 7-8 дней..

С.М.: *Hello everyone!!! Does anybody know, 2 or 3 good routes in Karelia for the first time trip for 7-8 days? (http://vk.com/topic-12281_1389579)*

О.К.: Хочется отдохнуть на шунгитных озерах, своим ходом, в палатках. Куда нужно ехать из Питера?

О.К.: *I would like to have a rest on the shungite lakes, under the canvos. Where can I go from Saint Petersburg? (http://vk.com/topic-12281_22349518)*

Exotic Karelia

The whole topic and 40 comments were devoted to the special exotic offer for tourists – a unique house in the middle of nowhere, without any electricity and neighbors for 20 kilometers. The price was 2000 rubles per night for a house. The provider could drive the tourist only to a place 10 km from the house, and afterwards, the tourist should ski or use snowshoes, because no one keeps the roads clear. “For those who really want to feel a real village...”. The reaction of the members was excited and people asked many questions:

А.С.: Здравствуйте. Оч понравилось предложение. А как до вас добираться? Я из Ульяновска, но хотя б из Питера как? И какая тама погодка скажем в июле-августе?

А.С.: *Hello. I liked the offer very much. How can we get there? I come from the Uljanovsk, but at least how can we get there from SPB? What is the weather there in July-August?*

2.6 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

According to the data analysed previously, many companies from Finland and Russia use VK as a marketing tool for promotional and information purposes. Groups in VK that are linked to tourism for Finland are more widely used than

groups about the Republic of Karelia. The Finnish groups are mostly used as a promotional tool for the webpage or an online client communication tool.

Here are the tips for entrepreneurs on how to succeed in the most popular social media channel in Russia, VK. Attention is paid especially on those who offer services for tourists:

- The name of the group should include the main idea of the group.
- The group should be moderated and well organised. This means that there should be a moderator who answers the questions, updates the information and deletes inappropriate comments.
- Too much selling took the enthusiasm away from the group members, people are more likely to participate in the discussion, not in straight advertising.
- VK is a Russian-speaking channel. There is no reason to create a group in English or other languages. All the groups that were examined in this study use only Russian language.

As this study has showed, the Russians use groups in VK as a channel for a discussion. Discussions can be created by a moderator or by a group member. Topics of the discussions about Finland are different from each other. They include comments regarding shopping and environment in Finland, visa and border procedures, prices and people. The most popular topic is shopping in Finland. In the groups of the Republic of Karelia people are interested in nature tourism, activities near lakes and forest and travelling by their own transport. They are mainly seeking active relaxation. The most popular topics in these groups are recommendations for the best places to visit and where to go. There is a difference in the nature of the groups for Finland and Russia. The members of the groups connected to the Republic of Karelia are more active to comment and in the groups related to Finland the members tend to observe more.

Groups in social media channel VK are used for interacting with potential and real consumers. It is used as an additional tool that supports a webpage of a company or an organisation. While marketing tourism services for group members their preferences should be taken into account. The moderator of the group can get information on the age and home city of the members. Attention should be focused on the popular discussion topics. According to Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica and O'Leary (2006), the technological marketing tool potential should be used by organisations. Users interact with each other, they create and share content and the tourism service provider cannot ignore this.

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3 Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation as tourist destinations – Image, familiarity and interest of travel from the European perspective

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

This part of the report presents the results of a study made on the image and familiarity of the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation. The target group for this study was European citizens with focus on Central Europeans. The study concentrated on what kind of images and opinions Europeans connect with the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation. Eastern Finland in this study means the areas of North Savo and North Karelia. Other issues investigated in this study were the interest in travelling to the area and the type of trips the Europeans would be interested in doing in the area. In addition, we enquired how current Russian visa policy affects Europeans' travel plans to Russia and what would be their opinion on travelling to Russia, if a visa was not required in the future.

The data for the study was collected via an electronic survey questionnaire, which was promoted in social media, Internet travel forums and a Google ad campaign directed to countries in Central Europe. The questionnaire received 284 responses, mostly from Austria, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.

In order to investigate what kind of images Europeans have of the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation, 33 destination image statements were selected based on tourism destination literature. These statements include, among others, opinions about urban themes (nightlife, entertainment, shopping and restaurants), rural themes (wilder-

ness activities, scenery, landscapes and natural attractions) and cultural themes (local cuisine, cultural attractions and activities and historic sites). The source articles are listed in Appendix I. The same 33 statements were used for both areas and the respondent was asked to answer either 'yes' or 'no' for each statement. The respondents had to answer all questions. Dolcinar and Grün (2013) have argued forced-choice full binary measure performs better in terms of stability and speed of completion. Prior to the thematic statements, the respondents were asked about earlier visitation to the area with answer options: a) s/he has visited the area, b) s/he has not visited the area, but has an image of it, or c) s/he has no idea of what the area is like. This allows the comparison between images for people who have visited the area and people who have not visited the area but have an idea about what the area is like.

3.2 RESULTS

3.2.1 Demographic information on the respondents

In Table 3.1, the demographic data for the respondents is shown. Over half of the respondents are females (59%) and 41% are males. The most common age class among respondents is 18 to 29 years old (46%), 30 to 39 being the second most common (23%). Regarding the life stage, most of the respondents are single (40%) or live in a relationship with no children (36%). As for education, most of the respondents have an academic education (43%). Upper secondary school is second most common (27%). Regarding occupation, most of the respondents are workers (33%). Students are the second largest group (31%). Fifteen per cent of the respondents hold a managerial position (15%).

GENDER		EDUCATION	
Female	59 %	Academic	43 %
Male	41 %	Comprehensive school	4 %
		Polytechnic	13 %
		Other	9 %
AGE		Upper secondary school	27 %
Under 18	1 %	Vocational school	3 %
18-29	46 %		
30-39	23 %	OCCUPATION	
40-49	13 %	Clerk	5 %
50-59	11 %	Entrepreneur	9 %
60-69	3 %	Managerial position	15 %
70+	2 %	Retired	2 %
		Student	31 %
LIFE STAGE		Unemployed	4 %
In a relationship (no children)	36 %	Worker	33 %
In a relationship (with at least one child)	22 %		
Single	40 %		
Single parent	2 %		

Table 3.1. Demographic information about the respondents (N = 248).

The countries of residence for respondents are shown in Figure 3.1. Most of the respondents live in Austria (22%), Germany (19%), Italy (14%) or the United Kingdom (12%). These countries locate in the focus area of the survey.

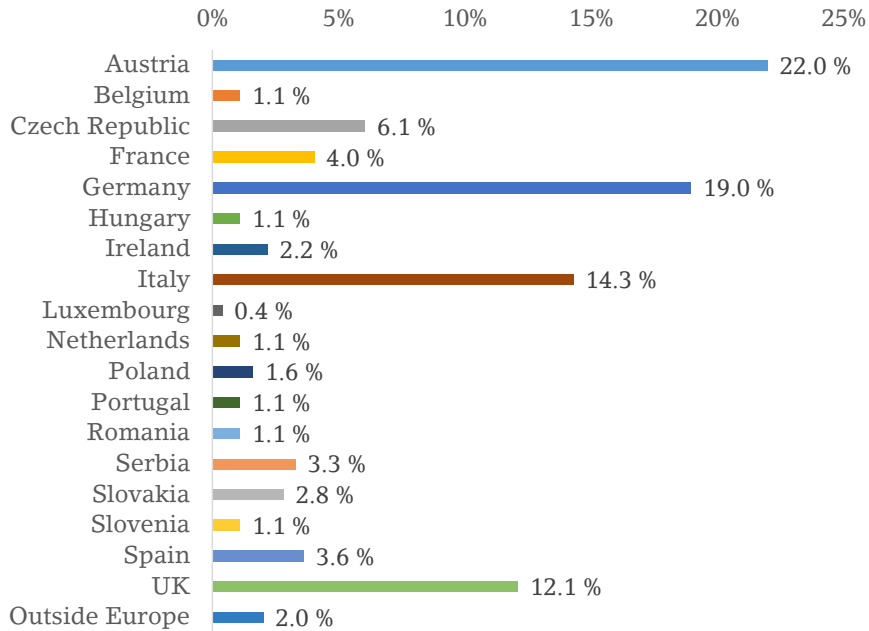


Figure 3.1. Information about the respondents' countries of residence (N = 248).

In Table 3.2, the information about visitation to the areas is shown. Only a small amount of the respondents has visited Eastern Finland (4%) and the Republic of Karelia (1.6%) previously. When asked if the respondent had any idea or previous knowledge of the areas, 46% answered that they have an idea of what Eastern Finland is like and 34% told that they have comprehension of what the Republic of Karelia is like. Most of the respondents did not have any idea of what the areas could be like.

Have you visited..	Yes	No, but I have an idea about the area	No. I have no idea what the area is like
Eastern Finland	4.0 %	45.6 %	50.4 %
The Republic of Karelia	1.6 %	34.3 %	64.1 %

Table 3.2. Information about respondents' visitation and ideas of areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia (n = 248).

The destination image related statements and the respondents' agreeability with them are shown in Figure 3.2. The greater percentile values mean

that respondents have thought the statement to be more fitting for the area. Similarities in image statements for both areas, Eastern Finland (FI) and the Republic of Karelia (RU), can be found in nature related opinions such as area has natural attractions (FI=95.6%, RU=92.3%), the area offers beautiful scenery and landscapes (FI=97.8%, RU=91.2%), and the area offers wilderness activities (FI=98.9%, RU=89.0%).

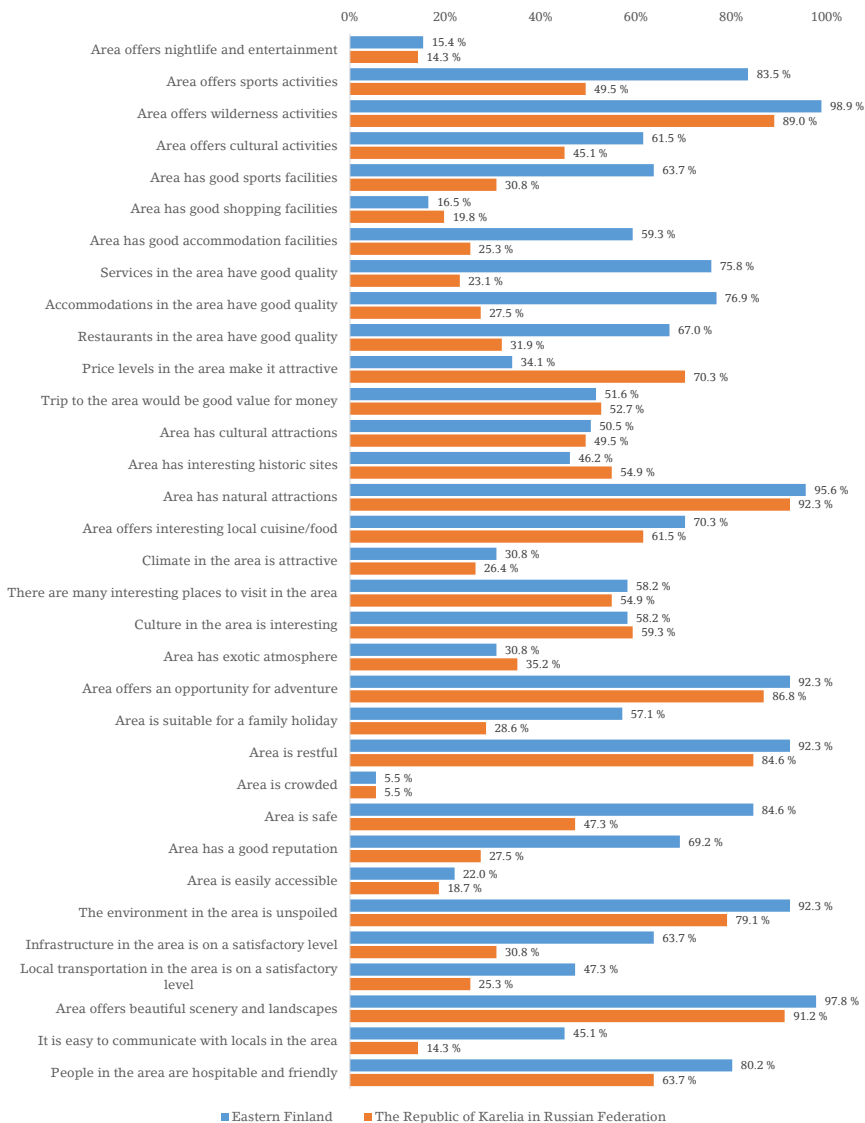


Figure 3.2. The respondents' opinions about the destination image statements. Higher value means that the statement is more fitting for the area (N = 248).

Moreover, respondents had similar opinions on both areas in the following statements: area is crowded (FI=5.5%, RU=5.5%), area offers nightlife and entertainment (FI=15.4%, RU=14.3%), area has good shopping facilities (FI=16.5%, RU=19.8%) and area is easily accessible (FI=22.0%, RU=18.7%). However, the low percentage values for these statements mean that the respondents mostly disagreed with the statement. Some statements with similar opinions on both areas found their place in the middle: area has cultural attractions (FI=50.5%, RU=49.5%), trip to the area would be good value for money (FI=51.6%, RU=52.7%), there are many interesting places to visit in the area (FI=58.2%, RU=54.9%) and culture in the area is interesting (FI=58.2%, RU=59.3%).

The most drastic differences between the areas appear with the image statements regarding quality of reputation (FI=69.2%, RU=27.5%), safety (FI=84.6%, RU=47.3%) and the quality of services (FI=75.8%, RU=23.1%), accommodation (FI=76.9%, RU=27.5%) and restaurants (FI=67.0%, RU=31.9%). The opinions also differed in statements regarding offering of sports activities (FI=83.5%, RU=49.5%), the level of sports facilities (FI=63.7%, RU=25.3% 30.8) and the level of infrastructure (FI=63.7%, RU=30.8%). Most of the respondents thought that communicating with the locals could be challenging as 45% of the respondents thought that communicating with the locals is easy in Finland and 14% said it to be easy with people in the Republic of Karelia. According to the respondents Eastern Finland was seen more suitable for a family holiday than the Republic of Karelia (FI=57.1%, RU=28.6%).

Before giving their opinions on the image statements, the respondents were asked to tell if they had previously visited the area in question or if they thought that they had an understanding of what the area is like. In Table 3.3, the image statements regarding Eastern Finland are shown with all three groups. As the amount of respondents who have visited Eastern Finland is very small, not much emphasis is put on the examination of the opinions. The overall view of the opinions shows that there are no dramatic differences between the images of respondents who have at least some knowledge of the area and those who have no knowledge. Opinions differ in statements regarding the level of infrastructure and transportation in which those with no prior knowledge imagine them to be on a less satisfactory level. Furthermore, those with no prior knowledge about Eastern Finland think that the trip to the area would be good value for money and the restaurants have good quality. On the basis of the respondents' answers Eastern Finland seems to be an interesting destination as 40% of the respondents are interested in visiting Eastern Finland and 47% would consider visiting Eastern Finland in the future (Table 3.4).

EASTERN FINLAND	Have visited (N = 10)	Have an idea of the area (N = 113)	Have no idea what the area is like (N = 125)
Area offers nightlife and entertainment	10 %	11 %	21 %
Area offers sports activities	90 %	79 %	86 %
Area offers wilderness activities (e.g. hiking, fishing, hunting)	100 %	100 %	98 %
Area offers cultural activities	70 %	58 %	63 %
Area has good sports facilities	60 %	58 %	70 %
Area has good shopping facilities	10 %	16 %	19 %
Area has good accommodation facilities	60 %	68 %	51 %
Services in the area have good quality	90 %	76 %	72 %
Accommodations in the area have good quality	70 %	87 %	70 %
Restaurants in the area have good quality	70 %	58 %	74 %
Price levels in the area make it attractive	30 %	29 %	40 %
Trip to the area would be good value for money	50 %	42 %	60 %
Area has cultural attractions	70 %	53 %	44 %
Area has interesting historic sites	50 %	45 %	47 %
Area has natural attractions	100 %	92 %	98 %
Area offers interesting local cuisine/food	60 %	71 %	72 %
Climate in the area is attractive	60 %	32 %	23 %
There are many interesting places to visit in the area	50 %	66 %	53 %
Culture in the area is interesting	60 %	61 %	56 %
Area has an exotic atmosphere	50 %	32 %	26 %
Area offers an opportunity for adventure	90 %	95 %	91 %
Area is suitable for a family holiday	80 %	63 %	47 %
Area is restful	100 %	89 %	93 %
Area is crowded	-	3 %	9 %
Area is safe	100 %	95 %	72 %
Area has a good reputation	80 %	71 %	65 %
Area is easily accessible	10 %	26 %	21 %
The environment in the area is unspoiled	90 %	95 %	91 %
Infrastructure in the area is on a satisfactory level	70 %	74 %	53 %
Local transportation in the area is on a satisfactory level	50 %	58 %	37 %
Area offers beautiful scenery and landscapes	100 %	95 %	100 %
It is easy to communicate with locals in the area	60 %	42 %	44 %
People in the area are hospitable and friendly	90 %	76 %	81 %

Table 3.3. Percentage of the respondents who agree with image statement for the area of Eastern Finland. Higher value means that the statement is more fitting for the area.

Are you interested in visiting Eastern Finland?	
Yes	40 %
I could consider visiting	47 %
No	13 %

Table 3.4. The interest of visiting Eastern Finland (N = 248).

For the majority of the respondents, the Republic of Karelia is unfamiliar as only four people have previously visited the area and one-third has some prior knowledge of the area. The image statements about the Republic of Karelia for each group are shown in Table 3.5. When examining the differences between the opinions of the groups, several statements become noticeable. For the respondents who are unfamiliar with the area the culture related statements do not seem to be part of the image of the Republic of Karelia. On the other hand, the respondents who have an idea of the area, the cultural activities and attractions, are strongly linked to the image of the area. Other statements where differences occur are safety of the area, the accessibility of the area and the hospitableness and friendliness of the people in the area. In all of the cases, the respondents who are unfamiliar with the area do not see these statements as fitting for the Republic of Karelia as the other respondents. Almost one-third of the respondents are interested in visiting the Republic of Karelia and 45% could consider visiting the area in the future (Table 3.6).

THE REPUBLIC OF KARELIA IN RUSSIAN FEDERATION	Have visited (N = 4)	Have an idea of the area (N = 80)	Have no idea what the area is like (N = 164)
Area offers nightlife and entertainment	25 %	13 %	14 %
Area offers sports activities	25 %	57 %	47 %
Area offers wilderness activities (e.g. hiking, fishing, hunting)	100 %	90 %	88 %
Area offers cultural activities	50 %	60 %	37 %
Area has good sports facilities	50 %	20 %	35 %
Area has good shopping facilities	-	30 %	16 %
Area has good accommodation facilities	-	30 %	25 %
Services in the area have good quality	-	37 %	18 %
Accommodations in the area have good quality	-	43 %	21 %
Restaurants in the area have good quality	25 %	43 %	26 %
Price levels in the area make it attractive	100 %	70 %	68 %
Trip to the area would be good value for money	100 %	67 %	42 %
Area has cultural attractions	75 %	67 %	39 %
Area has interesting historic sites	50 %	63 %	51 %
Area has natural attractions	100 %	97 %	89 %
Area offers interesting local cuisine/food	75 %	70 %	56 %
Climate in the area is attractive	25 %	37 %	21 %
There are many interesting places to visit in the area	75 %	73 %	44 %
Culture in the area is interesting	75 %	70 %	53 %
Area has an exotic atmosphere	75 %	40 %	30 %
Area offers an opportunity for adventure	75 %	97 %	82 %
Area is suitable for a family holiday	25 %	43 %	21 %
Area is restful	50 %	93 %	82 %
Area is crowded	-	10 %	4 %
Area is safe	50 %	67 %	37 %
Area has a good reputation	75 %	37 %	19 %
Area is easily accessible	50 %	33 %	9 %
The environment in the area is unspoiled	75 %	90 %	74 %
Infrastructure in the area is on a satisfactory level	25 %	43 %	25 %
Local transportation in the area is on a satisfactory level	50 %	33 %	19 %
Area offers beautiful scenery and landscapes	100 %	100 %	86 %
It is easy to communicate with locals in the area	25 %	17 %	12 %
People in the area are hospitable and friendly	75 %	80 %	54 %

Table 3.5. Percentage of the respondents who agree with image statement for the area of the Republic of Karelia. Higher value means that statement is more fitting for the area.

Are you interested in visiting the Republic of Karelia?	
Yes	29 %
I could consider visiting	45 %
No	26 %

Table 3.6. The interest of visiting the Republic of Karelia (N = 248).

Following the questions about the image of the areas, the respondents were asked to tell their opinions on interest in separate and combined package holiday tours in the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia. In addition, questions about the current visa policy of Russia were inquired, like do the respondents see the current visa policy as an obstacle to visit Russia. Moreover, if the visa policy changed in the future, how would it affect their interest in visiting Russia. Answers are shown in Table 3.7.

According to the respondents, the most interesting holiday options in the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia would be nature-based holidays in rural areas. The most interesting option is a nature-based holiday in rural areas of Eastern Finland since 27% of the respondents are planning to have this type of holiday and 57% would choose such a holiday if it was easily available. The second most interesting holiday option is a combined nature-based holiday in rural areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia. The third holiday option gaining most interest is a combined cultural holiday in Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia.

Answers to the questions about the visa policy of Russia show that 54% of the respondents think that the current visa requirement is an obstacle to travel and visit Russia. If there a change in the visa policy in the future, only 11% of the respondents felt that even though they would not need a visa to enter Russia, they still would not be interested in travelling there.

How interesting do you find the following holiday options?	I am planning to do this	I would do this, if it was easily available	Not interested
A combined nature-based holiday in rural areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia	14 %	56 %	30 %
A nature-based holiday in rural areas of Eastern Finland	27 %	57 %	15 %
A nature-based holiday in rural areas of the Republic of Karelia in Russia	11 %	42 %	47 %
A combined cultural holiday in Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russia	10 %	46 %	44 %
A cultural holiday in Eastern Finland	21 %	33 %	46 %
A cultural holiday in the Republic of Karelia in Russia	12 %	31 %	57 %
		Yes	No
Visa requirement is an obstacle for me to visit Russia		54 %	46 %
If there was a possibility to visit Russia without a visa...			
I would definitely visit Russia			38 %
I would consider visiting Russia			51 %
I still would not be interested visiting Russia			11 %

Table 3.7. Information about the attractiveness of varied holiday package tours and the state of Russian visa policy (N = 248).

3.3 SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of the responses received for this study, it can be said that the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in Russian Federation share a number of features when speaking of mental images of the areas. Interestingly, even though the areas are located next to each other, there are also a number of differing features. The strongest images for both areas are related to nature, natural attractions and scenery. For Europeans, both areas are seen to offer possibilities for wilderness activities and adventure. The areas are also thought to be restful and the environment unspoiled. The strongest differences between these two areas appear in statements regarding the quality of services, accommodation and restaurants. The respondents also considered Eastern Finland as an area to have a better reputation and to be safer than the Republic of Karelia. Although most of the respondents are unfamiliar with both areas, they still are interested in visiting Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia in the future. Half of the respondents considered

the requirement of a visa for travelling to Russia as an obstacle and almost 90% would at least consider visiting Russia if the visa requirement were removed in the future.

As both areas seem to be unfamiliar to the Europeans, that would suggest that there still is work to be done in developing desirable tourist attractions and holiday offerings to both areas followed by promoting and marketing activities. For the areas of Eastern Finland and the Republic of Karelia, this would most likely mean focusing on nature and rural tourism products, since according to the respondents of this study the mental images that the Europeans have, regarding both areas, are strongly related to nature and wilderness. However, if the results of the image statements are considered as the expectations that a European tourist has for the areas, a tourist service provider could use the results to create and develop the services in a way that they would meet these expectations. By delivering the services and the experience at least on the level of tourist's expectations, the tourist service provider is able to help the tourist to receive a memorable experience. By surpassing the expectations, the visitor should have an unforgettable experience and it is more than likely that after such a visit, a positive word-of-mouth will be passed around.

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APPENDIX I – THE LIST OF SOURCES FOR THE 33 DESTINATION IMAGE STATEMENTS USED IN THE STUDY

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**SATU KARHAPÄÄ-PUHAKKA &
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*The Attractiveness of Rural
Tourism Destinations in
the Republic of Karelia and
Eastern Finland*

What are the needs, expectations and motivations of potential Russian rural tourism customers? What are the main topics people discuss in the Russian social media channel VKontakte concerning tourism in Finland and in the Republic of Karelia? What kind of image do these areas have as a tourism destination in Central European target markets? You will find answers to these questions and other useful information on tourism customer segmentation in this report of research studies, written by the researchers of the University of Eastern Finland and Karelia University of Applied Sciences.



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